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"MY POOR CHILD!" HE SAID, "WHAT IS THE MATTER? CANNOT I HELP YOU?

GEORGE NAIRN'S CRIMES.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was June—the loveliest of English months. Summer was at its height; the roses bloomed in the cottage gardens round about Marton. The station-master's garden was bright with carnations and verbenas. The sun shone warmly on to the little rural platform; and as Iris Daryl alighted from the London train, she thought her lot had fallen in pleasant lines when she answered Mrs. Nairn's advertisement, and was engaged as governess at Marton Grange.

Anything more unlike one's preconceived notions of an instructress it would have been hard to find.

Iris was not quite nineteen; her hair had a bright tint which made it glitter like burnished gold in the sunshine; her eyes were dark, intense blue, but their brows and lashes were both black, and her skin was almost colourless.

Things had gone hardly with her since her father's death. Three years of drudgery as junior teacher in a fashionable school had taken some of the buoyancy from her step, and shadowed her open brow; but still she was strangely child-like for her eighteen years, and her smile had in it something wonderfully winning. It seemed almost as though nature had given the girl the charm of gaining love and affection for herself, since there was no one left in the wide world of whom she could demand either as a matter of right and justice.

"Can you tell me the way to Marton Grange?" she asked the solitary porter, in a voice whose musical accent betrayed that there had been something un-English in her bringing up. "Is it very far?"

The man rubbed his head, and looked puzzled, stared at the young lady, and at last asked another question instead of answering hers.

"Sure you don't want to go there, miss? Strangers never go to Marton Grange nowadays!"

There was something in his tone which proved his words were not meant as an impertinence, but were the simple expression of his thoughts.

Iris shivered even in the summer sunshine. There was a significant stress on the word "never" which made her think less hopefully of her lot.

"I am going to live at Marton Grange," she said, quietly; "and I should be very glad if you will show me the way there. Mrs. Nairn is expecting me."

Still the bewildered look on the man's face, still the amazed surprise in his manner.

"You cross over the stile, and keep to the path across the fields," he directed. "It's a matter of three miles, and you can't miss the way. If you take your bag with you, I'll give the box to the carrier in the morning; but you'll never stay there!"

Iris was not given to idle curiosity, nor yet to

talking to strangers, yet she could not refrain from speaking once more to the man.

"Why not?"

He turned away sheepishly.

"Reckon you'll find out soon enough, miss, without my telling you!"

It was not a propitious commencement.

Iris had to think over all the advantages of the place again and again before she could shake off the impression of the porter's words.

It had seemed to her a perfect fortune when she obtained Mrs. Nairn's situation. She had been sadly overworked at Kensington, and the principal, a good woman in the main, if rather fond of exacting too much from her subordinates, told her she must make a change.

Miss Daryl was welcome to stay at Cambridge House till she found something else, but she had far better seek an easier situation. A week later appeared the advertisement which offered a "quiet country home and liberal salary to a young lady who would undertake the education of a little girl of nine." Iris had answered it, without much hope, stating her qualifications, and giving Miss Stone as reference.

The reply was astounding. It came by return of post, and engaged her at once at a salary of a hundred a-year!

Miss Stone was delighted. She assured Iris Marton was in the healthiest part of Yorkshire, and she would soon get well and strong in the fresh, country air.

As to Iris, it seemed a dream. A hundred a-year for the care of one child, when she had taught twenty (that was the number of Miss Stone's junior class) for sixteen. It seemed to her a fortune.

She would not let the porter's manner damp her content. Caution whispered to her she knew absolutely nothing of Mrs. Nairn, who might turn out an adventuress, for aught she could tell; hope retorted Miss Stone had considered things perfectly satisfactory, and she was an experienced woman of the world.

Iris determined to look on the bright side of things. As to nobody going to Marton Grange, that would hardly affect her. Perhaps Mrs. Nairn was a widow, and had lived in great seclusion since her husband's death. Anyway, she would not begin by taking up foolish fancies; and this wise resolve brought her into a long, winding lane, evidently the high road from Marton to the next village, since a waggon was lumbering along.

Iris stopped, and asked the driver if she was on the way to Marton Grange. He answered "Yes," but there was an amazement on his face which told her he shared the porter's surprise at her destination.

She walked on bravely. Fresh beauties met her at every step. The hedge on either side was radiant with wild flowers. Beyond lay the cornfields, where scarlet poppies raised their heads fearlessly among the wheat. There was not a building of any kind in sight; only the cloudless blue sky above her head, and all nature's marvels around.

Iris forgot the porter's strange manner, and gave herself up to the delights of the scene.

Never since she came to England had she been amid such beauty. After three years in a London suburb, it was simply bliss to wander of her own sweet will down that picturesque lane. She must surely be happy at Marton, just for the beauties around her.

The next curve in the lane brought her to a low, red brick cottage, from whose gabled chimneys the smoke rose cheerfully. A woman stood at the gate in a sun bonnet, looking down the lane. Iris stopped involuntarily. The thought came that she might have reached her destination.

"Is this Marton Grange?"

"Yes, miss," returned the woman, pleasantly, "it is. Be you the new governess?"

Iris admitted her identity.

"The master have gone to meet you," replied the lodge-keeper, civilly. "Happen he was late. You've only to keep to the avenue, miss, and you'll soon be at the house. My boy's out or I'd send him to point out the way."

Iris declared this was needless, and turned into the chestnut avenue with an intense relief that at last she had met a person who did not express surprise at her arrival. The woman's words had been reassuring too. Her employers had cared enough about her comfort to send to meet her, and this was pleasant.

Mrs. Nairn was not a widow, so there must be some other reason for her secluded habits. Perhaps she was an invalid.

The avenue ended abruptly, and Iris found herself in a beautifully-kept flower garden, with thick trees bounding it in every direction save one corner, where stood a little white gate, evidently of modern origin. She tried to open it, and found it locked. There was nothing for it but to ring at the bell and wait for admittance.

She had to wait some time. She had ample leisure to notice the lack of harmony between the rough, clumsily-constructed gate and the exquisite beauty of the grounds; evidently some trees had been felled to make way for the gate. Mrs. Nairn must have an unconquerable dread of society, if she required such a barricade between her and the lovely approach to her home.

Another moment, and with a jangling noise—as though it was not used to the operation, and entered a protest—the gate rolled slowly back; a woman in a trim black gown and spotless white apron made way for Miss Daryl with a low curtsey.

Reader, have you ever taken a dislike to a person at first sight without the slightest cause or pretext? Have you afterwards accused yourself of prejudice, and got over the instinct sufficiently to trust that person until time recalled to you your first impression was the right one? I believe myself these so-called prejudices are instincts given to us for self-preservation. I never in my life shuddered, on meeting a stranger, without later on finding in that creature a foe to my peace.

I have been called "fanciful," "superstitious," and the like. I don't care. I recognise what people term my "prejudices" as warnings. I don't abuse the people against whom these "warnings" come. I don't strive to injure them in word or deed, but this much I do attempt—to avoid them.

Well, Miss Daryl who had come so hopefully to Yorkshire, who would not be depressed by the porter's communication nor the waggoner's amazement, yet shivered in the summer sunshine as Janet Thwaites held open the gate for her. A foreboding of evil seized her on the spot.

And yet most people would have taken Janet for the ideal of an old-fashioned servant. There was no attempt at being above her position—no shadow of patronage in her greeting of the governess. She was a woman whose age it was impossible to guess. She was between thirty and fifty-five; but whereabouts in the quarter of a century between to fix her age you could not tell.

She was tall, and had no figure. If you had taken a lengthy bolster (an attenuated one, with not too many feathers) and tied it in loosely—oh, very loosely, about a quarter of the way down—you would have had a very good idea of Janet Thwaites. She always wore black. It was never old and never new. You always had a kind of feeling her clothes must have been made a very long time ago, and yet you could never have called them shabby.

The face was long and square in shape, with a somewhat massive jaw. It was of one colour—a description which, perhaps, needs explaining. There are some faces which never freckle, and never tan, which are not particularly fair, and in youth are deemed pale. As time goes on, this pallor fades into a neutral whitey-brown tint; the lips, ashamed of their bright red, grow pale by sympathy; the eyebrows and lashes, never very perceptible, fade so as to become quite invisible.

These complexions are not very rare. I have seen some half-dozen in my life (men and women), but I never met a person afflicted with one—and, to my mind, it is an affliction—without discovering some taint or warp in their moral nature.

To resume. Her hair was tow-coloured and very scanty. She wore the front in bands down the side of her face; the back was hidden beneath a prim, black cap. The only thing white and fresh about her was her apron, a marvel of snowy calico. Janet's aprons were her strong point, and served a double purpose—not only did they increase materially her demure appearance, but she was apt to derive much occupation from rolling the corners.

If you spoke to the woman ten to one but she was twisting and untwisting the folds of her apron as she answered. She never looked you straight in the face if you were watching her. Sometimes you felt positive her small ferret-like eyes were fixed on you; but if you glanced up, far from detecting her in the act, Janet was seen to be busy with her apron.

"I shall never like that woman!" flashed through Iris Daryl's mind as she answered the servant's respectful greeting, but she only said aloud,—

"Are Mrs. Nairn and her little girl quite well?"

Janet's answer consisted of the same words inverted, so as to answer the question instead of asking it. To my mind nothing is more exasperating than to have one's own sentence as it were deserted and then hurled back at one.

"Mrs. Nairn and her little girl are quite well, ma'am," replied Janet, busy with the folds of her apron. Then, as they entered the house, "Will you go to your own room, ma'am?"

It was so evidently expected that she would do so that Iris agreed, though she was so hungry food would have been welcome, and she longed to get the first interview with her employers over and see what manner of folks she had come to live among.

One thing had struck her—the deserted appearance of the house. Beyond the white gate all seemed beautiful and cared for; passing through it you came on an old-fashioned, square garden, so neglected that only the flowers that come up year by year without touch of the gardener's hand were found there.

The gravel path was covered with weeds, the carnations and everlastings had run wild, and in some places quite overlopped the path. The house, a large stone building in the early Gothic style, was half covered with ivy, on which no pruning knife had come for years. The front door sorely needed paint, and the large hall had a weird, lonely aspect.

"I daresay you're tired, ma'am?" said Janet, affably, as Iris consented to go to her room. "Dinner is not till seven; but I'll bring you some tea if you like to lie down a bit and rest yourself."

Kindly words, but Iris did not feel grateful. She wanted to see Mrs. Nairn and her little pupil. Surely the mother might have spared a moment to welcome her after the long journey. She could not be ill since the servant had denied it. But, perhaps—happy thought—she had gone "with master" to the station.

Iris determined to find out. Overcoming her repugnance to Janet by an effort, she said, pleasantly,—

"This country seems very pretty. I never had a nicer walk than from the station here!"

"Yes, ma'am, the country seems very pretty."

This was exasperating. Had the woman no vocabulary of her own. Must she always phrase her sentences after the model of Iris.

"Is the little girl at home?"

"The little girl is at home, ma'am."

"I should like to see her."

"You will see her presently, ma'am," said Janet, to the girl's intense relief, at last wording a sentence for herself, "and if I'm not mistaken you'll soon see a great deal too much of her."

With that she flung open the door of a spacious bedroom, and motioned Miss Daryl to enter. Then, with a promise of tea, she disappeared.

Poor Iris!

She was not nineteen. Ever since she came to Kensington as pupil-teacher, three years ago, she had had what one calls a "hard life." It had been much work and little leisure. She had felt her health breaking down with the strain of

looking after twenty children under twelve and their wardrobes.

This situation at Marton had seemed to her hopes a very haven of rest. One little girl to teach, a refined home, and a liberal salary! Yet, as she threw herself wearily on a chair, she felt more dispirited than she had ever done amid the noisy, cheerful bustle at Cambridge House.

What mystery hung over Marton Grange? She was convinced that there was one. She was only a girl in years, but she had quick perceptions and ready intellect.

She felt certain that Marton Grange was not as other homes—that some heavy shadow hung over it. She went to the open window and looked out. The room was at the back of the house. In the distance she saw a beautifully-wooded park and grounds, evidently kept with no mean care; but close to the house all seemed neglected.

It was as though a narrow area round the Grange itself had been given over entirely to nature, and nature, beautiful in her wildness, yet could not compete with the grounds beyond, where art had stepped in, and worked with her hand-in-hand. On the one side of the white gate you saw signs of vast wealth, spent with no niggard hand; on the other all spoke of neglect merging into decay.

With a sigh she closed the window, and sat down.

She had nothing to complain of in the room allotted to her. It was large and airy; but there was something even in its space and loftiness alarming to a solitary girl who had only, in the last few months, been promoted from supervising a large dormitory of noisy children to a tiny slip of a room whose solitude was its chief charm.

Why, the large, old-fashioned bedstead in itself measured more square feet than the little room Iris had been so proud to occupy. Its dark crimson hangings had a weird, old-world air; the floor was polished to a dark brown, and the walls panelled half-way up in the same hue.

There were thick tapestry rugs scattered about, and the furniture was good and massive; but there was nothing homelike or bright about the room.

Iris thought she should never care for it, and its size oppressed her. A large screen, evidently meant to divide it into bedroom and study, was so hideously and grotesquely ugly that the girl half shuddered; and the large sofa had such a stiff-est air that it would have seemed almost treason to recline on it.

There was a good-sized table placed near the window, and a huge arm-chair drawn up to it.

In this Iris ensconced herself, wishing very much she might go to bed, instead of an hour and a-half later joining her employers at the late dinner.

She wondered if it was incumbent on her to change her dress. Her box was not yet come; but in her bag were lace ruffles and ribbons, by the help of which, perhaps, her quiet black cashmere would pass muster.

Oh! if only Mrs. Nairn would come and let her get the first introduction over.

She was not left alone long, ten minutes at the utmost, and Janet Thwaites returned, bearing a tray of refreshments.

The ham sandwiches were a picture in themselves, so nice and tempting did they look piled on a snowy damask napkin. The coffee reminded Iris of the coffee of her childhood, when she and her father had wandered together through foreign lands. She had tasted none like it since coming to England. The cream jug and sugar-basin were of silver, the china of delicate white porcelain.

Iris ate and drank, and felt refreshed.

"Dinner will be served at seven, ma'am," said Janet, civilly; "you'll hear the gong!"

Clearly there was nothing more to be gained, so Iris let her depart; and then, her vague fears vanishing as the sorely needed nourishment refreshed and strengthened her, the girl began her simple toilet, resolving bravely that she would not be one of those fanciful, hysterical governesses who are always imagining slights, and that Mrs. Nairn could hardly be so very inconsiderate since she had given directions for her reception.

Very likely she was tired, and did not care to see a stranger, or she might be busy. In fact, Iris had talked herself into quite a cheerful frame of mind, and made a dozen good excuses for Mrs. Nairn's non-appearance before the gong rang out its dreary summons; and she turned to leave her room, hoping some good chance would enlighten her as to the direction of the dining-room, since at present she had not the faintest idea of its whereabouts.

She made a pretty picture as she went slowly down the broad, oaken staircase.

Iris wore her plain black dress; but she had draped the front with an old lace handkerchief, knotting it at the bosom with a bow of crimson ribbons, and the sun fell on her hair, giving it a golden glory. She might have been taken for some fair young daughter of the old house rather than a poor little governess, whom no one had deemed it worth their while to welcome.

She paused at the foot of the stairs, wondering which way to turn. There was no sign of a servant to show her the dining-room. No pleasant rattle of glass and dinner betrayed the neighbourhood of that apartment.

"Miss Daryl, I believe?"

She looked up. A gentleman stood facing her with grave earnest face. He wore the regulation black evening suit, and there was a late white rosebud in his button-hole.

He was a strikingly-handsome man, dark, with abundant brown hair, large, expressive eyes, features well-cut and faultlessly regular; but there was something a trifle hard about his mouth, and Iris felt, as she met his eyes, that they could look very cruelly on anyone who offended him.

He smiled graciously at her evident hesitation.

"I must introduce myself," he said, slowly, "I am George Nairn, and I am very glad to welcome you to Marton Hall. My wife is not coming to dinner to-night, so you must accept me as your guide to the room where we take our meals."

Nothing could have been more perfect than his manner. His courtesy never bordered on familiarity. He mentioned his wife's absence as a matter of course, evidently thinking it quite natural the governess should dine *tête à-tête* with himself.

Iris felt it would be mock humility to object, so she accepted Mr. Nairn's arm and went in with him to dinner.

A surprise awaited her. The repast was laid for three, and the third person was already seated in the master's place at the head of the table—an old man, with long, shaggy white hair and fierce, angry expression. He was very old and very feeble. Iris saw that at once, and a dumb fear assailed her. Was he quite in his mind?

Mr. Nairn understood at once.

"Have no fear," he said, gently. "My uncle is very old, and nearly helpless, but he retains his intellect as clear as ever. Unfortunately he is very deaf, almost entirely so, so I fear it is useless to introduce you. Sir Douglas is the true master of Marton Grange. My wife and I are only his guests."

The dinner proceeded. It was perfectly served, and Sir Douglas showed a tolerable amount of interest in his choice of the various dishes. He spoke very seldom, and never looked at Iris until the dessert was on the table. Then he seemed to remember her existence, and stared at her with a scrutiny more eager than pleasant.

"Who is that girl, George?"

Sir Douglas being deaf himself was apt to fancy his friends were similarly afflicted; his intended whispers were usually audible at a long distance.

Iris heard the question perfectly, and blushed crimson. Mr. Nairn gave her an apologetic glance before he answered his uncle.

"That's Gertie's governess."

He spoke very slowly and in a high key, but it had to be repeated several times before it reached the old man's ear.

"Gertie's governess!" said Sir Douglas, musingly, and speaking as coolly as though the young lady in question were not at his elbow. "And a very pretty girl, too. But Gertie has no need of a governess, George. I've told you that time after time. The child 'll never live to want book learning. All she needs is to know how to get to Heaven, and maybe she knows that now without any teaching."

Mr. Nairn turned to Iris, sadly.

"And he speaks thus of my only child. A dozen times a day I have to listen to it. Confess, Miss Daryl, I need to be a patient man?"

Iris looked her sympathy.

"Is your little girl so delicate, really?"

Mr. Nairn paused.

"I don't believe it," he said, slowly. "I never did; but the old man has made up his mind she is going to die, and I am afraid he has converted my wife to his fears. Mrs. Nairn is a very nervous woman."

"Most mothers are anxious about the health of only children."

"Which proves that only children are a mistake," said Mr. Nairn, slowly. "Miss Daryl, if you can do anything to cheer and brighten my wife, you will be doing a real service, and one of far more value to us than turning out my little Gertie a learned lady."

He spoke so earnestly that Iris began to pity him. He could not have a very lively home, poor man, with old Sir Douglas ever prophesying evil, and his wife a nervous, fanciful woman.

Iris thought she understood the condition of things at the Grange now, and asked,—

"Is Mrs. Nairn well herself?"

"My wife enjoys perfect health—bodily."

He made such an ominous pause before the last word that Iris felt frightened, seeing which he added hastily,—

"My dear young lady, my poor wife can inspire you with nothing but pity and affection. She is a very sweet-tempered woman, but she lives only in her affections. She was never of strong intellect, and the successive loss of three children has altered her terribly. She seems as if nothing could make up to her for the little ones who are gone. She lives only now for Gertrude. I don't think she has a thought, an idea, not concentrated in the child."

Iris felt her heart ache for the bereaved mother.

"I do not wonder," she said, warmly. "It must be a terrible blow for a mother to lose three children."

Mr. Nairn looked a trifle grave.

"And it is nothing for a man to lose his boys and see his wife sinking into a confirmed, morbid invalid, because she makes no effort to throw off her grief! Heaven knows I sympathise with my wife; but, Miss Daryl, there is such a thing as sorrowing overmuch. Since the day her youngest boy died, Mrs. Nairn has refused to cross the threshold. She has never passed through the lodge gates since our boy was carried through them to his funeral. She never opens a book. She never writes a letter. She sits for hours with Gertrude on her lap, neither of them uttering a word. They were both fadin like two flowers on one stalk. There was nothing for it but to exert my authority. The life was bad for my wife. It was killing the child. There was no help for it but to advertise for a governess."

Iris trembled. A most unwelcome fear had occurred to her. Could it be that Mrs. Nairn was opposed to the scheme? Had she objected to the advertisement, and did she mean to treat the governess as an interloper? It really looked like it. Iris fancied this explained Mrs. Nairn's mysterious absence. She longed more than ever to get the first meeting with Gertie and her mother safely over.

She rose. She had eaten some early strawberries, and little as she knew of English etiquette, she was aware ladies did not linger while gentlemen took their time. It was passing hard to be there alone—to have to take her own position. She rose quietly, and asked Mr. Nairn,—

"May I go to Mrs. Nairn now?"

"I will take you myself."

Janet remained behind. Iris felt she saw a scornful smile pass over the woman's face as she followed Mr. Nairn from the room.

They went back to the entrance hall, down a long corridor to the left wing of the house. Mr.

Nairn knocked at a green baize door, but no answer came. He took a pass key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and Iris found herself in a very prettily furnished drawing-room.

Here all was bright and tasteful. You would not have expected to find such a room in the old Grange. It was divided into two by rich Eastern curtains drawn quite closely, and from the other side of these Iris heard a sweet voice singing,—

"Rose of the garden, blushing and gay,
Soon as we pluck thee fading away."

A frown crossed Mr. Nairn's face.

"I hope you have good spirits, Miss Daryl. I warn you you will need them here!" Then pushing aside the curtains he held them back for her to enter.

To her life's end Iris Daryl never forgot that scene. The room was beautiful as fairyland; the evening sunshine fell upon it, lighting it up with a soft brilliance. But she saw nothing of the art treasures, the triumph of upholsterer's skill displayed around. She had eyes only for the living figures in the picture.

In a low chair sat a young woman dressed in white muslin, her broad, black ribbons alone marking that she was in mourning.

At her feet, her head pillowed in her lap, reclined a white-robed child. The resemblance between them was marvellous. The same pale golden hair; the same pale, colourless complexion; the same china-blue eyes. But while the child's face was bright and hopeful the mother's was sad, with a dumb despair stamped upon its still features. There was no animation, no spirit, in Mrs. Nairn's countenance. Beautiful she must be ever, but it was more the beauty of a statue than of a living, breathing woman.

Iris stood spell-bound. Never had she seen such a lovely pair, never had she seen such a sad picture. Mr. Nairn's voice fell upon her ears, and the spell was broken.

"Helen," he said, quietly, and Iris noticed his voice betrayed no sign of emotion, or even of impatience. "Helen, this is Miss Daryl, the young lady you engaged as governess to our little Gertrude."

Mrs. Nairn never moved or spoke. Poor Iris wondered what to do. She advanced a step nearer and held out her hand.

"I shall do my best," she said, gently. "I am so fond of children, and they generally like me."

Helen Nairn looked at her slowly, a strange distrust gleaming in her light blue eyes.

"Where have I seen you before?"

The question took Iris by surprise.

"I do not think you can have seen me. I only came to England three years ago, and, since that, I have been teaching in a school."

"Have you a mother?"

"I cannot remember her. My father was all I had, and I lost him three years ago."

Mrs. Nairn's face softened just a shade.

"You loved him then? You were always together; you were all he had?"

"Yes, we were never parted for a day."

Mrs. Nairn put her hand on her child's head.

"Gertie is all I have—my life, my joy, my all! I only live for her sake, and you have come to part us."

Iris forgot Mr. Nairn's presence, forgot the pity she had felt for him in his domestic trials. She could only think of that heart-broken mother. She flung herself at Helen's feet, and took her hand.

"I could not part you and Gertie, Mrs. Nairn, if I wished it ever so. You are mistress in your own house, and I am only here to obey your wishes. If you really object to me, I will go away to-morrow; but I was so tired of school-life, the work there is so hard. It seemed like a holiday to come here and have only one little girl to teach."

A small voice interposed,—

"I like her face, mother," said Gertie, simply. "And her hair's like the angels' in my picture-book. Let the pretty lady stay, mother dear, to please me."

Mr. Nairn had turned on his heel and left the room. Iris did not remark till days later that neither wife nor child had once addressed him.

"You see," said Helen Nairn, sadly, "you have turned her heart against me already."

"No," pleaded Iris, "she won't love you less because she has someone else to care for her, dear Mrs. Nairn. A child's heart is not so small it can only hold one person. If you will let me try, I think I can win Gertie's affection. But she can never love me I know, of course, as she does her father and mother."

"She has got no father," said Mrs. Nairn hastily, to Miss Daryl's bewilderment.

"She meant Mr. Nairn," said Gertie, quickly. "Perhaps she does not know, mother," added the little girl, with a strange intuition.

The mother looked at Iris.

"If only he had not brought you I might have liked you. You are so young, and you look kind and merciful."

"Indeed, I hope you will try to like me," pleaded poor Iris. "I have not a friend in Yorkshire. My life will be sadly lonesome and dreary, Mrs. Nairn, if you and Gertie will not like me just a little."

"Did you ever see Mr. Nairn before?" demanded Gertie. "What made you come here?"

"I did not even know there was a Mr. Nairn," replied Iris. "I answered an advertisement in the *Times*, and a letter came, saying that Mrs. Nairn had engaged me as governess to her little girl. I don't know how I got the notion, but I fancied Mrs. Nairn was a widow."

"Then you are not his spy?" asked Helen.

"Indeed, indeed," said Iris, "I am not. I came here believing I should have a happy home with a lady and a little girl. I never dreamed of being a spy."

The next question was bewildering.

"What do you think of Mr. Nairn?"

"I don't know," said poor Iris. "He seems very anxious about Gertie—and about you."

"Did he try to make you think me mad?"

"Oh, no. He told me you were very sweet-tempered, but that trouble had made you sad and quiet."

Helen took the girl's hand and drew her nearer.

"I am going to trust you, Miss Daryl," she said, simply. "I am too weary and too heart-sick to reason about it; but I know I like your face. You will be true to me, won't you, and protect my child?"

"I will indeed."

The woman whose great sorrow was stamped upon her brow, stooped and kissed the girl whose life romance was all to come. The caress sealed the compact; these two henceforth were friends, the fair-haired child the great link between them.

Iris went to bed that night resolved that whatever mystery overshadowed Marton Grange she would never leave the house of her free will while her staying could comfort Mrs. Nairn and Gertie.

Then, as she brushed out her sunny hair, and caught a glimpse of her face in the glass, it flashed upon her why Mrs. Nairn had thought her features so familiar—they were her own.

Iris, in her humility, never dreamed she could be as beautiful as the sad, pale mother. Her hair was a deeper gold, her eyes a darker blue, her complexion a different type, her expression brighter. But for all that, the shape of the face, the style of the features, was the same. If sorrow ever bleached her hair and dulled the expression, why then—save for her dark eyes and their black lashes—her countenance would be identical with Mrs. Nairn's!

What did it mean?

Her father had been an only child. Her mother had no sister. How in the world could she, a little lonely orphan, have aught in common with the wealthy mistress of Marton?

But at last Iris laid her weary head on her pillow. Her last waking thought was that whatever mystery hung over the Grange, her own course was clearly to comfort Mrs. Nairn, and help her to cheer the little child whom old Sir Douglas had said was only fit for Heaven.

CHAPTER II.

Iris woke the next morning with a vague recollection that something had happened.

She sat up in bed and looked round the room, so different from her tiny sanctum at Kensington. She missed the buzz of girlish voices in the next apartment, the clanging of the big bell which daily roused the inhabitants of Cambridge House, and bit by bit the truth came back to her. This was Marton Grange, and she was governess to Gertrude Nairn, whom her mother declared had no father.

Iris thought over the whole scene, pondered over every incident of the evening before, and came to her conclusion quickly enough.

Mrs. Nairn disliked and distrusted her husband. Between the master and mistress of this beautiful home a great gulf yawned, and it had been caused in some strange way by their own child.

Mr. Nairn had said the Grange belonged to Sir Douglas, but it was easy to see that he enacted the part of master. Could it be that, viewing the estate as his own, he mourned that he had no son to come after him? Was it possible he would rather have parted with little Gertrude and saved one of her brothers? Could he have let this reach his wife; and, in her weak, nervous state, poor woman, had she taken up the notion he wished ill to the child?

Wild as this theory seemed, it was the only one Iris could think of.

At dinner the night before she had been half inclined to pity Mr. Nairn; but since she had seen his wife all her sympathy was for the mother and child.

Surely, plausible as was his manner, polished as his courtesy towards herself, George Nairn must have failed grievously in some duty towards his wife before she could gravely assert in his very presence that his child was fatherless—before she could have taught Gertrude herself to speak of him as "Mr. Nairn."

Iris wished she had remembered to inquire the hour of breakfast. None of the family looked like early risers. Still it was better to be prepared, and so it was barely eight o'clock when Miss Daryl went downstairs in her pretty grey morning-gown, a knot of cherry-coloured ribbons at her throat, looking the brightest thing that had been seen at Marton Grange for many a day.

Janet Thwaites was standing at the dining-room door as Iris passed. Her apron seemed to require a great deal of attention this morning.

"What time is breakfast?" asked Iris, pleasantly.

"Whatever time you like, miss," replied the woman civilly. "Mrs. Nairn and Miss Gertrude never come to it, and the master is mostly with Sir Douglas. You can have it in half-an-hour, if that'll do."

Iris said it would, and went out into the fresh air, feeling the shadow on the house must be greater now than she had feared, if none of the family ever met at meals.

She was walking round the foreign-looking verandah which ran along three sides of the house. Most of the rooms opened on to it with glass doors. Climbing ivy and monthly roses crept over the woodwork. Here and there were chairs. Iris was just going to sit down and enjoy the view when a voice called her.

"Miss Daryl!"

She turned in the direction of the sound, and to her amazement saw Mrs. Nairn and Gertrude. They wore summer dresses of white holland and broad, black ribbons. The almost transparent delicacy of their complexions struck Iris yet more by daylight.

"I am so glad to see you out!" she said, gaily, when she had kissed Gertrude, and shaken hands with Mrs. Nairn. "Janet told me you never get up till after breakfast."

"Janet must have wilfully deceived you," said Mrs. Nairn, quietly. "She knows I am always in the grounds at this time. I have told them to lay breakfast for you with us in my parlour, Miss Daryl, unless you would prefer the dining-room?"

"I would much rather be with you."

"We have a few minutes still; let me show you the view from the back of the house. It is generally admired very much."

And well it might be. Standing high, the Grange overlooked a wide prospect. The Yorkshire moors rose on one side; far away on the other rolled the sea. Iris felt the tears come into her eyes.

"It is so very beautiful!" she said, half apologetically. "I never thought England could be so lovely!"

"My child," said Helen, sadly, "don't cry because things are beautiful; save your tears for real troubles. What is it, Gertie?" for the child was pulling at her sleeve.

"Mother, he has just come out!"

Mrs. Nairn turned abruptly.

"We will go in. I can show you more another time. What do you think of the Grange, Miss Daryl?"

"It is the loveliest place I ever saw!"

"Ah! How old are you?"

"Just eighteen."

They were sitting at breakfast now; Mrs. Nairn presiding with a quiet grace which proved, no matter how trouble had depressed her, her good taste and delicate perception of a hostess's duties were quite unimpaired.

"When I was eighteen," she said, as she handed Iris her coffee, "I was like you. I believe I thought no place in the world could be so beautiful as this! You see, it was my home."

Iris started.

"Then you came here a bride?" wondering whether in those days Mr. Nairn had been less distasteful to his wife.

"No; I lived here all my childhood. I was eight years old when Uncle Douglas brought me here from my father's death-bed. I grew up as his own daughter, and I think no girl ever had a happier childhood. It almost breaks my heart when I think how different things are for Gertie!"

The child stole one little hand into her mother's.

"I am quite happy while I have you!" the action seemed to say.

Iris listened eagerly, hoping Mrs. Nairn would make some allusion to her husband, but none came, and presently they left the room, and went back to the verandah.

"I was thinking about you all last night," said Mrs. Nairn, quietly, when Gertie and her doll were out of hearing, "and the more I thought, the more bewildered I grew!"

"It is so simple," pleaded Iris, "if you would only believe me! Mr. Nairn advertised for a governess. The situation sounded just such an one as I was seeking, and I applied for it. I never had an idea, when I reached Marton, but that you had engaged me; in fact, I believed you were a widow!"

"I believe you!" said Helen, pressing one hand wearily to her aching head. "I like your voice, it sounds so true. But, Miss Daryl, it is his conduct, not yours, that so amazes me!"

"I think he feared you and Gertie were growing too used to sadness," said Iris, gently. "Perhaps he thought a governess would rouse her."

Mrs. Nairn shook her head.

"If you only knew!"

A strange impulse seized on Iris. Looking up into Mrs. Nairn's face, she cried,—

"Can you not trust me? Young and inexperienced as I am, I know from the moment I set foot in the Grange that it was not as other houses are. I seemed to feel a mystery in the air! I will be true to you in thought and deed if only you will give me your confidence, and let me try to help you!"

"No one can do that!"

"Mr. Nairn told me last night you had lost three children, and that their loss had saddened your whole life. But I cannot help thinking there must be something else."

"There is!"

"I am only a girl," said Iris, "but I can keep a secret. I have not a relation in the world, only an old lawyer, who is my guardian, and whom I have never seen. Mrs. Nairn I will hold your confidence as something sacred, if only you will give it to me!"

"You will despise me!" said the poor woman, feebly. "And yet it would be a relief to tell someone, just to pour out my grief! But, Miss Daryl, we must be cautious; and if Mr. Nairn once thought you and I were friends, you would leave the house the next day!"

Iris shuddered.

"Is it as bad as that?"

"It is worse!—far worse! I must not speak more now; later I may tell all. But, Miss Daryl, let me warn you of two things—Janet Thwaites is his spy; all she can find out she carries back to him; and if you want to help me and my child, keep friendly with my husband!"

She had given poor Iris no easy task. Frank and open by nature, the girl hated the very thought of her proposed rôle, but she believed in Helen's wrongs. She would have done anything in the world to serve her; and so when, ten minutes later, Janet summoned her to an interview with Mr. Nairn, she did her utmost to carry out his wife's instructions.

His manner to her was unchanged. The same attentive courtesy, the same silken tone; but Iris fancied, as he shook hands with her, his dark eyes searched her through and through.

"You have made acquaintance with my wife," he said, blandly. "What do you think of her?"

A trying question, but Miss Daryl answered demurely,—

"I think Mrs. Nairn must have been a very beautiful woman!"

Her husband smiled.

"She was the loveliest of her sex! But you have misunderstood my question. I mean, what did you think of her health?"

Which Iris interpreted to mean,—

"What do you think of her sanity? How much has she told you, and how much do you believe?"

"I think she is moping," said Miss Daryl, calmly. "Why don't you take her to the seaside?"

"She won't go. Change of air has been repeatedly advised, but she obstinately refuses to leave home."

"Then get some of her people to stay with her."

"You are fertile in prescriptions, but, unluckily, they are all unavailable. My wife has no 'people'; like myself, she is an orphan and an only child."

"I am quite sure she ought to be roused. If she had not taken such an unfortunate dislike to me, I would have proposed trying to persuade her to go out."

"Then you think she does dislike you. I fancied she had taken to you."

Poor Iris tried not to tell a deliberate untruth, and found it very difficult.

"I think Mrs. Nairn would hate anyone who came between her and Gertie. She has told me already she means us only to do lessons two hours a day, and that she shall stay in the room all the time."

"Poor Helen! She cannot be a good judge of character if she takes you for a stern disciplinarian," said Mr. Nairn, gallantly.

The look of undisguised admiration which accompanied his words terrified Iris more than anything he had said. Her position at the Grange, in any case, must be a trying one, but it would be simply unbearable if her pupil's father attempted to flirt with her.

"Gertrude is naturally her first thought," said Iris. "Perhaps, when Mrs. Nairn overcomes her prejudice, she may not care always to superintend our studies."

"And you don't mind her interference?"

"I have no right to mind it. A governess expects to find drawbacks to such an eligible situation as this."

"It seems hard lines that you should be a governess. But, Miss Daryl, we shall look on you quite as one of the family here. I assure you I shall take it as a pleasure if you will let me do my best to make you happy."

"I am always happy," said Iris, quietly. "I think, Mr. Nairn, life is very much what we make it. Except for my father's death, though I am poor and friendless, I have been happy."

"You must not call yourself friendless any longer. I assure you I should be proud to be your friend, if only in your sweetness you will endeavour to put up with my wife's caprices. I will do my best that she does not interfere materially with your comfort."

It reminded Iris of Helen's warning that when she left the dining-room she found Jane Thwaites so near the door as to leave no doubt she had been listening.

Nearly a week passed by. Lessons were begun, and Mrs. Nairn mostly lay on her sofa during their progress. She never spoke a word to Iris the whole house might not have overheard. She seemed quite to have forgotten her promise to confide in her. It was only one evening when Mr. Nairn had gone to a dinner-party, and Janet Thwaites was in bed with a bad toothache, that Helen appeared suddenly at Miss Daryl's door.

"Gertie is in bed, there is no one downstairs. For once I can speak without fear. Will you come to my room?"

Iris was wearing a blue dressing-gown, for she had been about to retire to rest. She linked her arm in Mrs. Nairn's and went downstairs with her to the room where they had first met.

A stranger would have taken them for sisters; an artist would have liked to paint them together as "Hope" and "Despair."

Helen Nairn fastened the door carefully, turned down the lamp, and then began her story.

"I can tell it you best in the faint half-light; then, if you despise me, I shall not see the scorn written in your eyes."

"I shall not despise you," said Iris, soothingly. "I have learned to love Gertie so dearly that I could not think harshly of her mother."

"I was only your age," said Helen Nairn, wistfully, "when I made my first great mistake. I had never known a care. My life had been all sunshine, for my dear old uncle half worshipped me, and poured out his wealth too gladly to give me pleasure. They told me I was beautiful, that apart from my future fortune, many a man would have been too happy had I smiled on him. I don't know if that was true, but I do know that the only man I ever cared for—he whom I madly idolised—cast never a thought to my uncle's wealth, but loved me for myself."

Iris stroked the hand she still held caressingly as she replied,—

"Love such as that must have made you happy. Surely then you had nothing left to wish for? Your lot sounds perfect."

"It does, indeed. I was happy, and my whole life might have been unclouded but for him!"

There was no mistaking the bitter stress upon the pronoun. Iris felt she alluded to her husband.

"He made mischief between you?"

"He did. I must have been mad with folly. George Nairn was my uncle's steward, and being the son of an old friend, Sir Douglas received him as an equal, and he was often at the Grange. My uncle trusted him in all things, and I believed him worthy of that confidence. He it was ventured to hint to me that Vere Tempest sought me for what I had. Miss Daryl, I cannot explain it to you, I suppose it was infatuation, my cruel suspicions, but I was deceived. I believed the proofs Mr. Nairn brought forward—they seemed so conclusive. There was, indeed, no flaw in his chain of evidence, unless I had been clever enough to guess he invented the whole story.

"It was not for long years after that I knew the truth. I had a stormy interview with my lover. He was proud, and, hurt by my want of faith, would deny nothing. I might believe what I pleased, he told me; if I could not trust him I was unworthy his love. Miss Daryl, it is more than ten years ago. I have never seen him since, and yet the thought of that parting with Vere Tempest pains me even now."

"It was his fault," cried Iris, decidedly, "he ought to have explained."

Mrs. Nairn shook her head.

"I ought to have trusted him. Besides, I was rich and he was poor. I should have recollected how sensitive that would make him."

"And you married Mr. Nairn?"

"No. I believe he wished it. I think now

that was what he plotted for; but he was too wary to excite my suspicions by speaking of his hopes. He went to London for a time on my uncle's business. When he returned it was my wedding-day!"

Iris started.

"You married someone else—not Mr. Nairn?"

"Surely you never thought he was Gertrude's father? Could I speak of him before her as I do if she had been his child?"

Iris felt as though a mist had fallen from her eyes.

"How blind you must have thought me!"

"I thought you very sympathetic for one so young. I can't tell you why I married. Vere's face haunted me. Perhaps I thought I should forget him when I wore someone else's wedding-ring—but I never did."

"And your husband?"

Mrs. Nairn smiled faintly.

"He almost worshipped me. He was years older than I, a banker of enormous wealth. He had never heard of my engagement to his brother. It was such a short time, and the secret had been kept well."

Iris opened her eyes.

"You married Mr. Tempest's brother?"

"Yes. I knew he loved me. He was the one person in the world I trusted, and it seemed to me—don't tremble so—it seemed to me I must forget Vere when I was his sister."

"And you never saw him?"

"Never once! He was in the army, and at the time of the rupture with me he exchanged into a foreign regiment. As time went on and Roger received firm refusals to all his entreaties to Vere to come home, he grew uneasy.

"Iris, here is where you will blame me; I know I blame myself. I could not tell my husband his brother would not come to England on a visit because he shrank from meeting me, and when I found Roger was taking up the notion Vere had believed himself the heir, and resented the coming of our children because they stood between him and wealth, it seemed such a satisfactory explanation I let him go on in his mistake."

"It was unkind, but how could you help it?"

"It was selfish, but I have been punished. My marriage was not happy. Roger idolised me and the children, and he was so good; he had all his brother's truth and constancy. He was not the love of my life, but yet I mourned him very really when four years ago he left me. He died abroad. We had lived in France for some months, and the end was sudden at the last; there was no time for him to alter his will even had he wished it."

"And you came home?"

Mrs. Nairn shook her head.

"No; Uncle Douglas was failing even then. I had no one very near to me in England. I preferred remaining where I was. The old lawyer who had managed my husband's affairs came over to explain things to me. Then I knew the evil I had done. I never dreamed I could work Vere any more harm until I listened to Mr. Danvers."

"Mr. Danvers! Does he live in Pump-court?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"He is my guardian. He came over to Italy to fetch me when papa died, and found me my situation at Miss Stone's. He has been very kind to me. He keeps all my father's papers, and told me once perhaps there would be a little money for me when I came of age, only I was not to count on it, because it was quite uncertain. I like Mr. Danvers, Mrs. Nairn. I think you might trust him."

"I do; but you will hear soon I have put it out of his power to help me. My husband's will was dated after Vere's last refusal to apply for leave to come to England, and his name was not even mentioned in it. Everything poor Roger had he bequeathed to me for my life. At my death one half was to go to Roger, our eldest boy, and the other half to be divided among the other children. If Roger died young the next brother was to be his heir. If all the children died before their majority, then I had power to dispose of the fortune by will, and invest the capital as I pleased; but so long as any of my four children lived, I was but a life tenant, and could not remove the money from the funds. Let me put it plainer, Miss Daryl. If I died to-morrow, Gertrude would be a ward of Chancery, and the owner of half a million of money, and Mr. Nairn would lose all interest in her fortune and have no longer a share in her guardianship, unless it was given him by the Lord Chancellor."

"But you are not going to die!"

"I sometimes think it would be better for her."

"Better for Gertie to lose her mother! Why, dear Mrs. Nairn, you must be dreaming!"

"You don't understand," said Helen, hoarsely. "No danger threatens Gertie when once I am gone. No one would wish to remove her from life to endow her Uncle Vere with a handsome fortune; but if she died to-morrow don't you see I am her heir. I can only endow Mr. Nairn now with the control of fifteen thousand a year, which he cannot anticipate or increase by speculation. Were I childless, I should be the nominal and he the actual possessor of five hundred thousand pounds!"

Iris turned to her with a bleached face.

"You cannot think——"

"I dare not think," replied the other. "I never have an easy moment when Gertie is out of my sight. I let her have neither food nor pleasure unshared by me, for I know if it is to our enemy's interest to snap the thread of her young life, it is even more important to him to prolong mine."

"This is terrible!"

"I said you would despise me."

"I don't despise you, dear. I pity you more than words can say; but oh, I hope, I trust you are mistaken!"

"You have not heard all."

"No. You have yet to tell me how you came to marry Mr. Nairn."

"I don't know."

Iris started.

"It is quite true," said Helen, simply. "Remember I did not know then how he had deceived me about Vere. I was helpless and lonely. Mr. Danvers was so much incensed at Vere being passed over in the will that he would have no intercourse with me, save on the most formal terms. My uncle was old and helpless. I had put an impassable barrier between myself and Vere. I was friendless!"

"Surely not!"

"Well, it seemed so. I tired of France. I wanted to come home. I could not live at the Grange, a young widow, with Mr. Nairn, an unmarried man, domesticated there. He suggested we should marry; I refused him twice. Then I heard (I know now he started the rumour himself) his visits to me were creating a scandal. I was bringing a shadow on the name that was my children's. I had not a shadow of regard for George Nairn, but I thought he was a clever, good, prudent man, who would be a kind father to the children, and so two years and a-half ago I married him."

"And was he kind to you—at first?"

"I cannot say he has ever been unkind to me. Of harsh words and brutal conduct I have no complaints. I found out the part he had played in breaking my engagement to Vere, and I despised him. I am not a very cautious woman, and I suppose I let him see it. Then I never tried to conceal that the children were all the world to me, and he was nothing. We had one baby girl. She died, and the last link between us was broken."

"Were the children afraid of him?"

"They never 'took' to him, but none of them ever called him unkind. After baby went Roger began to droop. We had a doctor from York to meet our own attendant. They called the disease low fever, and said he would soon be well. In three months he was gone.

"Miss Daryl, the others followed. The doctor declared it was low fever. They were not strong children, and they drooped and died. I have read dozens of medical works, and I confess my boy's symptoms were those of low fever—but I have never felt easy since. I never said to Mr. Nairn in so many words what I feared, but I told him the moment Gertie ailed anything, even the merest trifle, I should go to London and stay with Mr. Danvers, so that she might have the best advice."

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing."

"You think he knew your motive?"

"I am sure of it; and whatever helped her brothers to the grave will not help Gertie. I have no shadow of proof against Mr. Nairn. He has nothing to gain from the boys' deaths, unless Gertie follows them. He was as kind and attentive as possible during their illness, but," she lowered her voice, "he could not stay in the room where they died. He would not pass by its door while they lay dead, and though our way to church goes just by their little graves, never does he forget to make a long *détour* so as to avoid the spot."

"And you have told no one?"

"I told the vicar—an old man who had christened me and married me. He thought me insane. I asked the doctor from York if Gertie showed the slightest signs of her brother's complaint, and he said 'No.' If I kept her in the free, open country, breathing her native air, she might grow into a strong woman; but he warned me she was of a delicate brain, and any over-study might bring on disease."

"And this is why you stay here?"

"Here I can model my life as I will. I have a suite of rooms for myself and Gertie, into which Mr. Nairn and Janet never come. The time he brought you to my boudoir was the first he has entered it for months. An old woman, who was my housekeeper in Roger's lifetime, has gladly come back as Gertrude's nurse. Between us surely we can watch. If I took the child away I could not prevent Mr. Nairn from accompanying us. No, she is safer here."

"And you see no one?"

"No one."

"It must be lonely."

"It is. I brood over my griefs till I feel well-nigh distracted. Miss Daryl, you may remember an old fairy-tale in which his daughter being destined to die from pricking her finger with a spinning-wheel, a king banishes all spinning-wheels from his kingdom. I have striven to do the same for Gertie."

"I don't understand."

"Listen. Diseases of an infectious kind are carried in the clothes. I never let the gardeners pass beyond the white gate you noticed. I will have no children about the house. Old nurse or I always follow Gertie wherever she goes. We only let her walk in the park. She never goes into the grounds unless no gardeners are about. Except yourself she has seen no one from beyond the Grange for months. Surely my unfailing care must save her."

Iris felt dimly something was wrong. In trying to enact the part of Providence to her child Mrs. Nairn seemed defying Heaven.

"It would be better if you could trust the Lord more," she whispered. "Surely He would take care of Gertie."

"She is all I have."

Silence, then the mother started up.

"You don't mean you think her ill?"

"She looks so delicate," answered Iris; "and she has such a sad, grave face. Oh! Mrs. Nairn, she is like a flower that has never seen the sunshine!"

"She has me!"

"I should like to see her laugh and play with other children!"

"You don't understand. She is all I have. I must take care of Gertie."

It was throwing words away. Iris felt poor Mrs. Nairn had, indeed, good cause to be careful of her only child. She wondered if the precautions and preventatives with which her mother-love had hedged in the little girl would avail.

Iris herself had a strange recollection of an old saying that no plant too much watered thrives, and she feared dimly so it might prove with Gertie. She had never been able to forget the old uncle's remark that first night, "Gertie is only fit for Heaven!"

She dared not repeat that to Mrs. Nairn any

more than she would have ventured to remind her that in the old fairy-tale she had quoted, the princess did find a spinning-wheel, although they had been banished from her father's kingdom.

CHAPTER III.

TIME passed on until Iris Daryl had been three months at Marton. She had improved in health. The fresh, country air, the easeful life and luxuries which surrounded her had changed the thin, fragile-looking governess into a blooming girl; but for the deep sympathy she felt for Mrs. Nairn, Iris would have been completely happy.

But the mystery which hung over the Grange was deep as ever. Mr. and Mrs. Nairn rarely met. They never touched each other's hands in the most ordinary greeting. Helen made not the slightest attempt to hide the aversion with which she regarded him.

Between the two Iris often felt perplexed. In her sympathy for the sorrowing mother she felt a shrinking from the easy-going, prosperous master of Marton; but when she thought over the matter calmly she acknowledged she had no proof of anything against him.

He led an honourable, upright life—or seemed to. He was a good master, a faithful friend and caretaker to poor infirm Sir Douglas; and, in spite of his wife's marked disdain, he never failed in courtesy and consideration to her, and seemed really fond of Gertrude.

The peculiar retirement in which the family lived threw Iris more into his company than she desired. Helen Nairn, in her strange fear of all that concerned her child, declared Miss Daryl must in no wise offend Mr. Nairn lest she should be replaced by a less acceptable teacher.

"I can trust you!" the poor woman would whisper. "I am not jealous, even though Gertrude loves you. If once he suspects I like you he will send you away. Don't make him angry; listen when he tells you I am foolish and fanciful. Ride with him when he wishes it. If only he and Janet Thwaites think you on their side all will be well."

Poor Iris could not refuse a request so urged. She accompanied Mr. Nairn on some country rides, and even went with him to York on a day's shopping. He always treated her with a marked cordiality, and as the time were on he made no attempt to hide from her his knowledge of his wife's suspicion.

"You have been with us three months," he said to her one day when he met her in the park. "You have seen me day after day. I ask you, do you think I seem the kind of man to conspire against innocent children to enrich myself? My wife thinks me a murderer. I daresay she has told you as much?"

Poor Iris felt in a terrible strait.

"I think Mrs. Nairn's grief for her children has made her almost morbid on the matter."

He looked up attentively.

"And morbid feelings freely indulged in lead to madness. Miss Daryl, I often fear that unprejudiced persons would call my wife insane."

"Oh, no!"

"Don't you know the first symptom of insanity is a dislike to those the patient has formerly loved. Look at Helen's life. When I married her she was a most brilliant creature; she delighted in music and books, she held her own in society like a queen. Now she never opens the piano or takes up a book, while her persistent denials of herself to visitors have so offended our neighbours that from month's end to month's end not a creature comes near us."

"If you spoke to her," hazarded Iris, "would it not be better?"

He shook his head.

"I know of no remedy save one."

"And that is?"

He hesitated.

"You will not tell her? Remember Miss Daryl, to be successful the remedy must be sudden and unexpected."

"You may rely on my not doing anything which could be against Mrs. Nairn's recovery."

He looked at her sharply.

"The one chance of saving her intellect is to separate her from her child!"

"It would kill her!"

He shook his head.

"It would destroy for ever her morbid fancies. Once let her see that Gertie ails nothing, and can be perfectly well and happy without the terrible anxiety she feels for her, and Helen would be herself again."

"If that is your remedy I am sure it cannot answer. Mrs. Nairn would never consent."

"But how if her consent were not asked!"

"You would not be so cruel."

"Miss Daryl, try to look at the matter from my side. I am not an old man."

"I never thought you were!"

"I am barely forty. There may be thirty years of life left me! Must I spend them all like this—lifeless, homeless, yet bound by bonds I dare not break? Miss Daryl," and his voice had a sudden passion in it, "I am the most miserable of men. Heaven knows I meant to be a good husband to my poor Helen. I loved her once. Is it my fault that she has destroyed that love, and that I regret the tie between us as thoroughly as she does?"

"Could you not be separated?" asked Iris. "Surely, if you feel like this, you would be happier apart!"

"I shall never be happy again!" returned George Nairn, mournfully. "Two years and a half ago I made a great mistake—I married a woman who did not love me."

"But if you were parted!" urged Iris. "Surely you would forget!"

"If we were parted, it would not give me back my freedom!—would not suffer me to offer my hand where my heart has strayed. Miss Daryl, Iris, forgive me!"

It was an awful moment to Iris Daryl. Pure and innocent as she was she could not misunderstand his meaning. He was actually daring to tell her, that he, a married man, loved her. The shame and misery of it seemed more than she could bear. She was Helen Nairn's friend, and at her request she had given more of her society to Mr. Nairn than she cared to—and this was the end. With one indignant bound she had left his side, and sped away as fast as her feet would carry her.

George Nairn watched her until she was out of sight.

"Will she carry the news to Helen, I wonder!" he asked himself. "Hardly; my last disclosure will effectually make her hold her tongue. If she insinuates to my wife I wish to part her from the child it will only be what Helen has suspected for months. Well, I was born to be a rich man, and I can't help what steps I have to take to accomplish my destiny."

Iris hardly noticed where she was going. She did not know in her agitation that she had walked miles, and had passed unperceived beyond the boundaries of the Marton property, and was wandering in a wood which belonged to Mrs. Melville, a near neighbour of the Nairns, whose very name she had never heard.

Worn out with trouble and excitement she flung herself on to the fallen branch of a tree; and sitting there, with her head buried in her hands, she sobbed as though her very heart was breaking.

What could she do? She longed to run away at once, and never set foot in the Grange again; but then she was only a friendless little orphan. She had no home to run to, no relations to welcome her; besides, Gertie and her mother, how could she bear to leave them? Mr. Nairn's words that morning had made her as inclined to suspect him of any evil as his poor wife herself. Evidently he meant, at any cost, to separate the child from her mother, and they would need poor Iris more than ever.

"What is the matter?"

Iris started to her feet, and saw a gentleman bending over her with a kind, concerned face. He might have been the same age as George Nairn, but his was a very different countenance; honour, truth, and compassion were stamped upon his features.

"My poor child!" he said, gravely, "what is the matter? Can I not help you?"

"I am not a child!" said Iris, a little indignant even then at the mistake, and guessing that from her plain white dress and untrimmed straw hat he had taken her for some little villager.

She started to her feet; then, for the first time, he saw her face, and, to her surprise, his own grew very pale.

"Helen!" he exclaimed, hastily. "But no, it is impossible!"

Iris caught at the words.

"Did you take me for Mrs. Nairn? Are you a friend of hers?" she cried, impulsively.

"I was struck by your resemblance to her! I have not seen her for many years."

"But you are a friend of hers!"

"I would do a great deal to help her, for Roger Tempest's sake; but——"

Iris forgot she had never seen him before, and that she had felt very angry with him for thinking her a child. She cried eagerly,—

"If you are a friend of hers you will tell me what to do. You will help me!"

He smiled.

"I feared I had offended you rather seriously by offering you my aid."

"I was foolish!"

"Nay," he said, gently, "I startled you. But when I came upon you first I thought I had found some child in trouble."

"I am in great trouble."

"And you will let me help you? We will sit down comfortably on this old tree, and you shall tell me all about it. But, first, can you explain your bewildering likeness to Mrs. Nairn?"

Iris shook her head.

"She notices it herself, so I suppose I must be like her. But I am no relation. I never even heard of her till I came to be Gertie's governess three months ago."

"Gertie's governess! And what is the heiress like?"

"She is the sweetest child you ever saw; but——"

"But what? And may I not know your name?"

"I am Iris Daryl. I cannot explain to you about Gertie. She is not ill. Old Sir Douglas always says she is only fit for Heaven, and I—I have just the same feeling!"

"And you were crying over it?"

"No; not over that."

"What then? Miss Daryl, no good ever yet came of a half-confidence. If I am to help you I must know all."

"But Mr. Nairn!" Iris shivered. "I think he would kill me if you told him."

"Be easy. George Nairn and I are not on speaking terms. My hostess, Mrs. Melville, has a great antipathy to him."

Poor Iris told her story. She kept back nothing save the fact of Mr. Nairn's admiration for herself. From the surprise of the porter on her arrival at Marton, to George Nairn's declaration his wife's reason was failing, she poured out her story.

"You will help her!" pleaded Iris. "I think it would kill her if Gertie were taken from her!"

He sighed.

"I remember her the queen of Marton Grange, the favourite of all the country-side. If any future ever looked fair it was hers; and she has come to this!"

"But you will save her!"

"Miss Daryl, of all people in the world I am the one least able to interfere. All that I can do must be by stealth. If we are to do any good, you must never mention this meeting to a creature at the Grange."

"I will not! oh, I will not! But what do you think? If you knew how my brain aches with trying to find out what to believe!"

"Believe anything you like of George Nairn, and, however black you imagine him, you will not wrong him. He is a fiend! I cannot tell you half the wickedness he has wrought, and yet so cleverly that he is able to pose as a respectable man. Money is his god! Have no fear that he will do anything to shorten his wife's life, since only through her could he hope to inherit the

Marton property, which brings in ten thousand a-year!"

"But Gertie and the little boys!"

The stranger hesitated.

"I once knew Mrs. Nairn well. I don't think she is the woman to conceive such an idea without grounds. I should say that if he did not actually contrive the death of the children he hastened it."

"Mrs. Nairn says the Vicar thought her suspicions absurd."

"Dear old man! he is so guileless himself it would be easy to deceive him. Besides, Nairn leads a model life here, and is rather pitied than otherwise in the neighbourhood."

"Pitied! He!"

"Mrs. Nairn's conduct has made her most unpopular. Indeed, she has acted in such an eccentric manner that the rumour of her insanity—carefully spread no doubt by her husband—is steadily gaining ground."

Iris started.

"You don't believe it!"

"I fear I was near doing so till I met you. Of course, I can see the man's drift now. With Helen in an asylum, Mr. Nairn would be the real owner of the Marton property, and of Vere Tempest's if he could get rid of the child!"

Iris clasped her hands in entreaty.

"But you will save her!"

"Personally, I am powerless; but this much I can do. An old lawyer, a friend of mine, is in some sense Gertrude's trustee. I can persuade him to come down here and see Mrs. Nairn. If he invited her and her child on a visit, I don't see her husband could prevent their going; and, once away, it would be easy for her to refuse to return."

"And shall I tell her?"

"That you met me! Certainly not."

"No, shall I tell her what Mr. Nairn contemplates? It seems cruel to hide it."

"It would be cruelty to reveal it, Miss Daryl. All you can do for Mrs. Nairn is to keep as much with her as possible, and if that wretch should attempt to shut her up in an asylum, find out the address and send it to Mrs. Melville. I need not warn you if her mother is removed from the Grange, you must watch over Gertie by night and by day."

"It seems so terrible that anyone should be so wicked just for money!"

"There are few things people won't do for money. When you are a woman you will know that to be rich is your destiny. It doesn't matter how many hearts you break in reaching wealth."

Iris shivered.

"Please don't talk like that!"

"Why not?"

"It sounds as though you believed in nothing," she said, sadly.

"And I have cause." Then, his voice changing, "Believe me, Miss Daryl, I may trust very few people, but I have faith in you. For your sake I will do what I can to serve the unhappy lady of the Grange."

"Did she ever offend you?" asked Iris. "You seem to dislike her."

"Do I!"

"You would not if you saw her now. She seems just like one whose very heart is broken."

"Poor Helen!" returned the stranger, slowly, "and I remember her the merriest girl in Yorkshire. Miss Daryl, if I am to catch the last train to Yorkshire I must leave you now. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER IV.

Iris thought that day the longest she had ever spent. It was so hard to sit with Mrs. Nairn and say nothing of all that had happened. They spent the afternoon quite quietly with the child.

Helen fancied Gertie was unusually tired and languid; she seemed not to care to play, but sat with her golden head resting lovingly on Miss Daryl's shoulder.

"If she is not better to-morrow I shall send for the doctor," declared Mrs. Nairn, "and her cough is so troublesome. Gertie, you must take a dose of your cough mixture before you go to bed."

The child sighed as though she did not like the prospect, and Iris hoped Mrs. Nairn would forget it; for, to her mind, poor Gertie was quite a martyr to the various remedies kept for her use by her careful mother.

As it happened, Mrs. Nairn did forget, and Gertie was allowed to go to bed without any mention of the cough medicine; but the mother, who was indeed far more in need of remedies than the child, poured out a tablespoonful for herself, and drank it before retiring.

"I don't want to get really ill," she said, simply. "It would give him an excuse for parting us. Miss Daryl, did you know he has gone to London?"

"I had no idea of it."

"Nurse saw him starting. He told her he should be away three or four days. Iris, I wonder if it is wicked of me, but when he is away I feel so safe!"

Iris herself had very mingled feelings about Mr. Nairn's absence. It was delightful to think she need not see him for some days. But what if he had gone to London to carry out his cruel scheme, and brought back some unscrupulous doctors who would declare poor Helen of unsound mind?

If only Mr. Danvers could come while he was away, how easily Mrs. Nairn's deliverance could be effected!

Iris thought over it a great deal, and at last she determined on her own responsibility to telegraph to Mr. Danvers.

She had a vague idea that telegrams, though they passed through many hands, were yet kept secret. Besides, Mr. Danvers was her guardian. If her message ever got into Mr. Nairn's hands she could urge this fact, and he could hardly prove she had not wanted to see the lawyer on her own affairs.

There was a post-office in Marton village, only one mile from the Grange, and it opened for telegraph business at eight o'clock. Breakfast time was half-an-hour later, so that it would be quite possible for her to do her errand and be back without Mrs. Nairn suspecting she had been farther than her usual morning stroll in the park. It could do no harm, and it might be of great use.

Iris was lavish in her expenditure that morning. It was in the days of twenty words for a shilling; but she far exceeded that limit.

This was her summons:

"Can you make your proposed visit to me to-day? It is most urgent that you should do so, as, if you do, all can be easily arranged. He is away."

She walked home blithely. She seemed to tread on air. This was Tuesday, and Mr. Nairn was not expected till Friday. Surely, if Mr. Danvers obeyed her summons Helen and her child would be safe from all pursuit before he returned?

She walked up the avenue singing "Coming thro' the rye." For years after she could not hear that song without a strange pain, so vividly did it recall the events of that morning.

Janet Thwaites met her on the verandah.

"I should think you'd like your breakfast alone this morning, Miss Daryl?" she said, not unkindly. "Mrs. Nairn has not even begun to get up yet."

"Where is Gertie?"

"With her mother, I suppose. Will you wait, Miss Daryl, or have your breakfast."

"I think I'll have it, please, Janet. I feel hungry."

But she had not sat down to it when the nurse and Gertie appeared—Gertie wan and heavy, looking more as though she had come to the close of a long day than as though the day had hardly begun.

"Mother's sleeping still," she said, clinging lovingly to Iris. "And I'm so tired. My cough kept me awake a lot."

"She's just taken a dose of the mixture," said nurse, in an approving tone. "The mistress had left it on the table. She do sleep soundly, Miss Daryl. She never even stirred when I went in to dress Miss Gertrude."

Breakfast was begun, but Gertie could hardly touch anything, she seemed overcome with sleep; and at last Iris made her lie down on the sofa, and very soon she fell asleep.

The young governess felt troubled at the child's pale, heavy look, and the moment nurse had removed the breakfast things she asked to see Mrs. Nairn.

"I am sure she would rather we disturb her than that Gertie suffered. I want to know if I had better send for the doctor."

"I'd send, miss, if I were you," said the old woman, sagaciously. "The mistress'll be thankful to you; it's so little sleep she gets it seems a shame to disturb her."

Iris yielded. A groom was dispatched, and, oddly enough, he met the doctor just by the lodge gates.

Dr. Garnies was a young physician, and he had concurred implicitly in his brother practitioner's verdict of the three little boys. He could not set up his opinion in opposition to that of the great man from York, but he had felt just enough uneasy to warn Mrs. Nairn always to send for him directly if Gertie ailed anything.

"These low, feverish attacks are easily cured if taken in time," he told her. "It is only the delay that makes them dangerous."

"I have done my best," was his self-consolation, after he had given this advice. "Even if Nairn is not straightforward he would not dare attempt anything rapid; and if once I detect the symptoms that troubled me last time, Gertrude shall go to London if I kidnap her myself."

So Dr. Garnies had just sufficient distrust of Mr. Nairn to make him very tender and patient with poor Helen. More than once she had sent for him because Gertrude "seemed ill," when he knew the child ailed nothing; but he never failed to obey her call rapidly just because he always had an uneasy sort of feeling trouble might come.

He and Iris had met more than once, so that she had no embarrassment in receiving him.

"It is my fault, doctor," she explained, "If we have given you a needless journey. Mrs. Nairn is not up yet, and Gertie looks so ill."

"Is she in bed?"

"No; she says her cough kept her awake all night. She took some of the mixture you sent as soon as she was up, and now she has fallen asleep."

Another moment, and the doctor was standing over the child. Iris felt, by the sudden change in his face, that something very serious was wrong.

"What have you been giving this child?" he demanded of nurse.

"Nothing, sir," said nurse, in an aggrieved tone. "She took one dose of your mixture when she got up, and she had nothing else save a bit of breakfast!"

"She has been poisoned. Heaven help her poor mother!"

"Can't you save her?" pleaded Iris. "Oh, sir, do try for her mother's sake!"

"She is dead!" he said, quietly. "She must have been dead some moments when I came in. Nurse, what has caused it?"

"Surely I can't tell you, sir. She was as well as possible, except for her cough, when she went to bed. She sleeps in her mother's room, and my room opens from it. The two outer doors were locked all night; no one could have come in."

"And Mrs. Nairn is in bed. Surely that is very unusual?"

"It is, sir. My mistress has so little sleep I couldn't bear to rouse her. Her cough has been troublesome too. She took a dose of tha ry mixture when she went to bed."

Dr. Garnies' face changed.

"I must see her!"

They left the dead child with the old nurse, Iris pausing to kiss the sweet, calm face before she followed Dr. Garnies to Mrs. Nairn's room.

"How shall we tell her!" she whispered. "Oh, doctor, it will kill her!"

But the doctor had reached the bedside, and

drawing away the curtain, stood gazing on the quiet features.

"We need not tell her," he answered. "Miss Daryl, Heaven has been very merciful to her. She is with her child!"

It was even so. The bottle of cough mixture must have been abstracted from Mrs. Nairn's medicine chest, and sufficient poison added as to make a single dose fatal. The hand which did the cruel deed belonged to Janet Thwaites or George Nairn; it was never clearly proved which. No doubt it never occurred to them that Mrs. Nairn would take some of the medicine as well as her child.

There was an inquest, and the verdict recorded was "death from misadventure." The bottle discovered on Mrs. Nairn's table, though precisely similar to the one holding the cough mixture, bore no label, and the theory suggested by the lawyer who "watched the case" for George Nairn was that in a fit of nervous abstraction the poor mother had taken the wrong bottle in mistake.

No one in their heart believed this; but it could not bring back Helen and her little girl to life—to prove her husband was a murderer. It would benefit no one to take vengeance on the wretched man, so he and his accomplice escaped scot free; but neither Jane Thwaites nor her sometime master ever showed their face in Yorkshire again.

Mr. Danvers obeyed the summons poor Iris had sent before she knew of the tragedy that was to come. His self-reproach for his neglect of his old friend's widow was very keen.

"You see, my dear," he told Iris, "I loved Vere Tempest as my own son, and I was indignant at his sister-in-law's being enriched at his expense. Well, it all comes back to him now. Mrs. Nairn died some hours before her child, and he is poor Gertie's next-of-kin."

"I suppose he will come to England now?"

Mr. Danvers opened his eyes.

"He's been in England for months. Why you saw him yourself yesterday."

A burning blush dyed her cheeks.

"Was that Mr. Tempest?"

"To be sure. Well, he's no landed property, but he comes in for half-a-million of money. A very pretty fortune!"

"Mr. Danvers, shall I ask Miss Stone to take me back, or will you find me another situation?"

"I don't think you'll need one."

"Why not?"

"Look here, Iris, you come home with me for a week. I can't tell you anything positively until I have had an interview with that scoundrel Nairn."

This puzzled Iris very much, but perhaps she was almost more astounded when Mr. Danvers told her her own story.

"Did you never wonder at your likeness to poor Mrs. Nairn?" he asked her, when the inquest on Helen and her child was over, and the papers had had their last say about the Marton tragedy.

"Often."

"You met old Sir Douglas? Did he ever speak to you?"

"He said he had seen me before. What will become of him now, Mr. Danvers? He can't live at the Grange all alone."

"He is dead, child. Died quite naturally of old age. His faculties had been impaired for many years, but I think he was well cared for. Nairn did his duty to him if to no one else."

"And Marton Grange is deserted? Do you know, in spite of all the troubles there, I loved the place."

"I am delighted to hear it," said the lawyer, rubbing his hands, "because you'll probably have to live there."

"To live there? Me!"

"Well, your mother was Sir Douglas's only child, and though he threatened to disinherit her when she married your father, he always put off making his will. He died intestate, and you are lady of Marton Grange!"

"I rather fancy," he went on gravely, "George Nairn knew you were the rightful heiress, and that is why he preferred you to all other applicants to the post of Gertie's governess."

"But——"

"In my opinion, Iris, you have escaped a great danger. He was not a man to stick at trifles. You were a nearer heir than his wife to Marton. I believe if you had shown the least disposition to marry, you would have found yourself prevented. He meant either to keep you under his own eye, a helpless girl, easily crushed if dangerous, or else to kindly help you out of the world as he did those poor children."

"Then I was Mrs. Nairn's cousin?"

"She and your mother were first cousins. Well, young lady, you see your situation is found for you—that of mistress of Marton Grange."

Iris sighed.

"I don't like it a bit."

"Very ungrateful of you. Why not?"

"It will be so lonely."

"You'll marry?"

Iris shook her head.

"Never."

* * * * *

Once more in the September sunshine Vere Tempest and Iris Daryl stand together in the woods round Marton. In manly, earnest tones he tells her how he has learned to love her, if not with the boyish passion he felt for the ill-fated Helen, yet with a steady, constant love which will endure for life.

"It is a grave gap, I know," he said, fondly, "between nineteen and thirty-six; but, my darling, cannot love bridge it over? Iris, won't you give yourself to me to be the sunshine of my life?"

* * * * *

We know not how she answered, but when the spring flowers bloomed for the second time on Helen's grave there was a simple wedding in Marton Church; and now Vere Tempest has a wife whom he loves as truly as ever he loved his boyhood's choice, and whose beauty is the pride of all that country-side.

Mr. Danvers cites the Tempests as the happiest couple he knows, and often declares Vere ought to be peculiarly grateful to the advertisement which lured Iris to Yorkshire in the time of THE MYSTERY OF MARTON GRANGE.

[THE END]

BEAUTY, from a Japanese standpoint, consists of a long oval face, regular features, almond-shaped eyes, sloping slightly upward, a high, narrow forehead, and abundance of smooth, black hair. Their movements are graceful, although the style of their dress prevents them from walking with ease; their feet and hands are delicately formed, and their manners unquestionably charming. They take little or no exercise, and one wonders sometimes how the little ladies employ their time—there seems so little to be done in a Japanese house. To begin with, there are no regular meals. The shops near at hand supply daily numberless little dishes which seem to be eaten at all hours of the day and night—a few pecks at a time—with those impossible little chopsticks. Very little is kept in the larder except some slices of daikon, fermented turnip, some rice, and sweet biscuits.

IN NASSAU, the capital city of the Bahama Islands, they say "the tree in the public square"—not the trees. Now, the public square of Nassau is quite as large as that of most cities of the size, but there is only one tree in it, and that tree literally fills the square and spreads its shade over all the public buildings in the neighbourhood, for it is the largest tree in the world at its base, although it is hardly taller than a three-story house. It is variously known as a ceiba, or a silk cotton tree, but the people of the low islands of the West Indies call it the hurricane tree. For no matter how hard the wind blows it cannot disturb the mighty buttressed trunk of the ceiba. In the hurricane of last spring all the palms and many of the other trees of Nassau were overturned, but the great hurricane tree, although it lost all its leaves, did not lose so much as a branch. Its trunk throws out great curving, wing-like branches, some of them twenty feet wide and nearly as high. These extend into the ground on all sides and brace the tree against all attack, while the great branches spread a thick shade overhead. In the tropic sunshine of midsummer hundreds, even thousands of people may gather in the cool of its shadow. No one knows how old the great tree is, but it must have been growing hundreds, if not thousands, of years. A very old picture in the library at Nassau shows the tree as big as it is at present, and even the oldest native in the island cannot remember when it was a bit smaller.

THERE is found in the chasm of the Devil's Bite, Wyoming, U.S.A., and there alone, a curious little animal, which is generally known as the fleck o' gold, though it also rejoices in the equally glittering names of the golden guide and the golden gopher. The little fellow undoubtedly belongs to the gopher tribe. The fleck o' gold is of a general golden hue. This hue represents the various shades of gold, from the duller colours of the precious metal in its native state to the brilliancy given by the stamp of the mint. The duller hues are blended on the body, while the brighter one spreads itself along the tail. The tail is the glory of the little creature, and the wonder of the beholder. Fifteen inches in length, or more than three times as long as the animal of which it is such a dazzling continuation, this tail is as the glance of gold. It is instinct with action, an action which has no apparent purpose but that of display, and jerks and writhes, curls and twists with the swiftness and light of a sun ray. The fleck o' gold is vainglorious concerning this tail, and when for his own edification he folds it many times around his body, transforming himself into a ball of burnished bullion, the brilliant exhibition pleads hard in extenuation of the small creature's vanity. The fleck o' gold digs deep, and his burrow is regarded as an unfailing indication of the presence of gold. As a matter of course, many and diverse speculations are extant in regard to the origin of this singular and brilliant little animal. The theory most advanced and believed is that the fleck o' gold was at first but a common gopher, but that the constant contact with the golden soil in which he burrowed so flecked his coat with the precious yellow particles that nature herself at last took cognizance of the matter, and the golden coat was made hereditary.

HAD WE NEVER LOVED SO BLINDLY

—:o:—

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FLORA TREVANION sat alone in the sitting-room after Sir Basil Fane had left her, feeling dazed and bewildered, as if she scarcely knew where she was.

Sometimes it seemed to her that she had made a bargain, and paid a price. Eustace was to be cured, and she was to marry Sir Basil. Instead of paying the surgeon's fee she was to pay the Baronet.

And then she told herself that she ought to be the proudest girl in the world, because he had chosen her before all the rest who would have been so willing to be selected.

His love was a treasure which she ought to prize beyond everything when he poured it out so lavishly over her young head. He was so noble, so generous, so tender-hearted, in spite of his stern face and rather haughty bearing. There was nothing mean or calculating about him; he seemed as far above the generality of country gentlemen as Snowdon is higher than the Surrey hills.

Though he could ride across country with the foremost in the wake of the hounds, and handle a rod or a gun with skill, he could talk of something else besides fox-hunting, and other kinds of sport, for his brain had not grown torpid amongst bucolics.

He was a lover to charm a girl by his personal

beauty and winning smile, and one to please a woman by the power of his intellect.

With him there could be no dulness, for he would while away the hours with the most interesting conversation; with him there could be no doubt, for he was unchangeable as a rock. Oh! it must be happiness to be his wife—only—only—she felt so frightened!

Mrs. Willoughby came into the room, and her face was a study. Her expression was as complicated as her feelings. She was sorry that Flora had cut out both of the twins, and was to make a "splendid marriage" as she called it, before either of them had had an offer; but it redounded to her credit that her husband's ward should be so satisfactorily married from his house, and all the neighbourhood would say they had done their duty by her.

With a conscious pride she therefore enclosed her in her matronly arms, and murmured as she kissed her,—

"My dear child, I wish you all possible happiness."

Then Flora, softened by the kind words, and having no mother to go to, put her head down on Mrs. Willoughby's shoulder, and burst out crying.

The solicitor's wife was quite taken aback, although she knew it was the proper thing to drop a few tears on these occasions; but such a deluge as this from a girl whom she always considered rather reserved was almost alarming.

She made her sit down, and patted her hair, muttering such soothing words as came into her head. She was not a bad-hearted woman in a general way, only she had been jealous of Flora from the beginning, for her children's sake; and many a mother in her position would be tempted to be unkind to a girl who was far more attractive than her daughters.

Now her heart was softened to her, and she remembered that the poor child had no mother, and she tried to take her place.

"You know it is such a capital match! They say Lady Rivers wanted him for her daughter, and the Duchess wouldn't have been sorry to secure him for hers; and Greylands is such a beautiful place—with a rent-roll of I don't know how many thousands—and nobody seems to know if you would ever be able to go back to Trevanion Hall, so that this is the most fortunate thing that could have happened; and not far from us, too, so that you needn't feel lonely, for the girls can run up and see you whenever you like. And such a good thing for Eustace! I was always so sorry that we couldn't do more for him, but you see Mr. Willoughby is so much engaged, that we couldn't see much society; and now you will be able to give parties of your own, dances, and dinner-parties, and that sort of thing to make the place cheerful for Sir Basil. Child, it is a great destiny for you," her voice quite awe-struck, "and I only pray that you may be equal to it."

"Why did he ask me?"

"Why? Well," with a smile, as she thought it the most extraordinary question possible, "I should think you knew as well as I do. It was pretty evident from the first. When that silly Jenny made herself unhappy about Frank Rivers I told her there was no occasion—you were sure to be Lady Fane. Dear, dear, to think how much there is to be done, and so little time to do it in! I am sure I hope there'll be some money forthcoming, for I couldn't bear you to go without a proper trousseau. We must see about it at once."

"Oh! not to-day!"

Mrs. Willoughby's flow of words bewildered her; she wanted to be alone, and to think it all out by herself. At present she was in a dream, almost a nightmare. Old things seemed to be slipping away from her, and the new coming on so fast. There was no breathing space allowed.

Mrs. Willoughby left her after a few words of practical advice, then Emily and Jane came in, kissed her rapturously, and said they were so awfully delighted.

They were very much excited, and made a good deal of noise, laughing almost hysterically, for an engagement in the house was very upsetting. And who could say but it would be one of their turns next? Matrimony was so catching.

"You must have ducks of dresses for your bridesmaids, and Sir Basil is sure to give beautiful presents," said Jenny, in a transport, as she imagined herself receiving some wonderful bit of jewellery. There would be nobody now between her and Frank Rivers. Hurrah!

Flora said very little, but they were quite satisfied at having the conversation to themselves.

When they had taken themselves out of the room Mr. Willoughby came in with a very grave face. He said nothing at all, but simply took her in his arms, and kissed her, with the tears fast gathering in his eyes. What would the house be without his Popsy? He would miss her more than anyone could tell; but it was not of himself he was thinking as he grieved. He was uneasy in his mind, and yet he could scarcely have told anyone the reason why.

There was nothing against Sir Basil, and what he saw of him he liked; but as far as he could make out there was a mystery about him, and, as a lawyer he always thought very badly of anything he could not get to the bottom of.

The luncheon bell rang, so he gave her his arm in his old-fashioned way, and led her down blushing and trembling to the dining-room.

She scarcely dared to raise her eyes lest she should see a broad grin on Winter's face.

He was very attentive to her, and wanted to fill her glass about half-a-dozen times, as if he thought a bride-elect must be half intoxicated; but she had the presence of mind to shake her head whilst she played with a bit of lamb which did not get any smaller.

All that afternoon she thought of Eustace, but she could not possibly go to him.

He would be glad, she knew that, and surely that was enough for her, but she longed to feel the clasp of his thin fingers, and to look into his blue eyes.

There were only those two of the Trevanions in the world, and without him she would always feel desperately lonely.

Of course he would live at the Abbey now, and there would be no question of a return to the Firs.

Would she have to ask Sir Basil, or would he take it as a matter of course? Whilst she was wondering, Jenny came to tell her that the carriage from Greylands was at the gate, and Eustace inside it. They were to have a drive together, and then Flora was to be dropped at home.

"Is he there?" she asked, with a quick blush, as she put on her hat.

"No, strange to say, he isn't."

"Just like his kind thought!" and she flew downstairs leaving Jenny surprised at the top.

She sprang into the carriage and kissed her brother, looking into his delicate face with fondest affection, whilst she clasped his hands in both her own. How thin he looked, and how frail! Ought he really to be out? Wouldn't it be too much for him?"

"This is stunning!" he whispered, as he squeezed her fingers, and she knew there was no doubt about his feelings. A rush of thankfulness and joy came over her, as she nestled close to his side; and they drove over heath-covered hills to the forest, with the soft August air playing in their faces, and the sunlight laughing on the fields and the distant waters.

They did not say very much, for both their hearts were full; but she felt inexpressibly refreshed and comforted by being together, alone with him, and without any of the outer world to look on.

"I say, Flo, what fun we will have when I'm able to get about!" Eustace broke out excitedly, just as the drive was coming to an end. "What a brick Fane is! I shall owe my life and yours and everything to him; yet he'll scarcely let me say thank you. There never was anyone like him. He ought to be set on a marble stand and worshipped."

"The marble stand won't be necessary," she said, with a smile, as she thought of the joyful time coming when Eustace would be like other men, and no longer a helpless cripple. Couldn't she fall down and worship any man who gave her back her brother with the dreadful curse of lameness taken off him?

"Good-bye! darling," contenting herself with pressing his hand, as the footman was looking on, and sinking her voice to a whisper. "Soon there will be no good-bye, as we shall always be together."

He laughed and shook his head.

"There will have to be two to that bargain, and the other won't be me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Mr. Fane is in the drawing-room. His compliments, and he would be glad to have a few minutes' conversation with Miss Trevanion."

This announcement made by Winter at the end of dinner, in a measured tone, took the whole party by surprise.

"What on earth can Mr. Philip Fane want with you?" and Mr. Willoughby turned a perturbed face towards his ward. "I think I had better go to him, myself."

"If he asked for Flora, I suppose he wants nobody else," remarked his wife, whose curiosity was excited.

"I daresay he is only in a hurry with his congratulations," observed Emily, with some acidity. "If he had waited a little longer he would have shown better taste."

"Must I go?" and Flora rose reluctantly.

"Perhaps you had better. If he keeps you too long I shall come in. I don't like the fellow a bit."

"Now, papa," cried Emily, "I think he's very pleasant. I can get on with him much better than with Sir Basil."

"A change has come over the spirit of your dream," remarked Jenny, with a smile, whilst Flora walked out of the room and into the drawing-room, her face slightly flushed, and her heart beating fast.

"I hope you will forgive me for intruding at such an hour, Miss Trevanion," said Philip Fane, as he bent over her hand deferentially, "but I had a pressing reason for it."

"Indeed! That chair is the most comfortable," pointing to one at a little distance.

"Thanks, I think I would rather stand, till I've had my say out." He was dressed in his evening things, with a light coat thrown over them, and held his hat in his hand, as if he felt that his retreat might have to be made with speed. He cleared his throat, and looked out of the window, as if he did not care to meet her eyes, as he said slowly: "I heard some news this morning which startled me, and I've come to ask if it is true. Are you engaged to my cousin?"

"I think so," her lashes drooping. "You had better ask him if you doubt it."

"I prefer trusting to your lips than to his. Isn't it rather hasty? Is it wise to take such an important step?"

"Really, Mr. Fane, I can't see that this is any business of yours," she interrupted, indignantly.

"But it is. Why shouldn't it be mine as well as anyone else's? He is the nearest relation I have in the world."

"Then it is on his account you've come?" drawing herself up with shy dignity.

"Not at all. He would be the luckiest man in the world if the engagement stood, but I maintain that he has no right to marry. Don't be angry. I'm your best friend, and I want to save you before it is too late."

"You are very good," sarcastically.

"No, I'm very bad. I'm not disinterested, and I don't pretend to be."

"Everyone knows that you are the next heir to Greylands."

He bit his lip, and a dull red flushed across his face.

"'Pon my soul, you do me injustice. If you will have the truth, my interest is in Flora Trevanion, not in the Abbey of Greylands."

There was a pause, during which he watched her face closely, and saw that he had offended her deeply.

"I'm frank with you."

She thought of Sir Basil's words, and determined to be on her guard.

"I might have got up a tale, and pretended that I had no concern in the matter beyond pounds, shillings, and pence, and then you would have listened to me."

"Indeed, I shouldn't. I never will hear one word against Sir Basil, unless you speak it before his face."

"Nothing I should like better, but it would spoil everything. One day, I promise you," and his eyes flashed; "I'll speak before his face, and he shall have no chance but to listen to me. But then he must be single, without a wife to be stabbed to the heart by the knowledge of her husband's sin. You don't know what is before you, or you wouldn't be in such a hurry for a wedding-ring."

"I'm not in a hurry," with an angry blush.

"I'm told the wedding is to be in three weeks' time. You couldn't very well have shown more speed," a cold smile upon his lips. "But I know it is he that is pushing it on, not you, and I know the reason why. Do you think it is honourable, Miss Trevanion, to get a poor child irrevocably into your power, when you are aware that a crash is coming!"

A horrid misgiving came over her, in spite of her confidence in Sir Basil. She remembered the man over whom he had broken his whip, and she saw him (Sir Basil, not the other man) once again lying on the hill-side, half maddened by some secret trouble, and heard his passionate prayer addressed to herself: "Hate me, for Heaven's sake, hate me!" Why did he implore her to hate him than if he begged her to love him now! Whatever it might be, she would hear it from himself and not from Philip Fane, and she answered him coldly,—

"I don't understand what you are talking about."

"No, and you won't understand until it is too late. Oh, Miss Trevanion!" his voice deepening, his manner growing in earnestness as he went on. "Listen to me. There is a mystery about Basil; you can see that for yourself. Why did he stay away from Greylands for five years after it came into his possession? Wasn't it natural at least to run down and have a look at his new inheritance? Why did those placards appear on the very day of his return? The people knew nothing about it, no more did Mitchell. They were placed there by a man who knows more than I do, but I am waiting till I can screw it out of him."

"I know him," cried Flora, as she vividly remembered James Carter thrusting one of the odious papers into her hand, and its being torn from her by Sir Basil.

Philip Fane stepped back in amazement.

"You know him!" he said, as if he could scarcely credit his own ears. The gulf seemed wide between that creeping, low-bred villain, and the girl whom he thought the prettiest and daintiest on earth.

"At least I saw him on the day of the picnic."

"But he didn't dare to speak to you!"

"Yes. He gave me one of those horrid papers, and said something impertinent."

"What was it?" eagerly.

"Not worth repeating."

"But I might see a hidden meaning in it."

"Perhaps you might, but I'm not going to tell it you."

"You are too unkind. Will you put off your wedding for six months? Surely that would not be too long to enjoy the privileges of an engagement!"

"I see no use in keeping Eustace waiting, for no reason at all."

"There is a reason. But what is your brother waiting for? You talk as if you were going to marry him."

"He is waiting to be cured," her sweet face lighting up with sudden joy. "The operation cannot come off till I can go up to town with—with Sir Basil—to nurse him," looking down and blushing.

"Now I understand it at last. Trevanion's the decoy; this hope of a cure the bait," he cried, in great excitement. "Don't let yourself be deluded. Don't let yourself be hurried. Believe me if you will only consent to wait for six months you will owe me a debt of gratitude for life."

"I can't wait—and there is nothing against Sir Basil," throwing back her head and looking him full in the face, her beautiful eyes flashing. "He is the best, the truest, gentleman I ever knew."

Her beauty made him nearly mad, her words seemed to sting him. "Your experience has been so large," he said, with a sneer, "and every man nowadays with a handle to his name and a decent rent-roll is a gentleman."

"Shall I send for Mr. Willoughby? If you have a story to tell he is the best person to hear it. He would not believe too readily, and he wouldn't repeat a word."

"No. I will not tell it to anybody but yourself. When I have found out all that is hidden from me then you will hear it, whether you will or no, and your fine castle in the air will crumble about your ears. Till then I shall hold my tongue."

"And till then I hope you will keep away, and not plot against a man under his own roof," her breast heaving with indignation.

"I am not plotting, and I shall certainly keep away—at least as much as I can. You are very hard on me, Miss Trevanion. I came to do you a service, and you treat me like a pickpocket."

"Sir Basil has done you many services, and how do you behave to him?" looking up at him with reproachful eyes.

"Has he told you that he paid my bills?"

"No. You told me so yourself. He never says one word of all the good he does."

"No, he is as reserved as a closed door. He doesn't talk at all about himself. Ask him if he was in Monte Carlo in 1880?" with an evil smile.

"Ask him yourself. I don't like hitting in the dark."

"Would you be afraid of asking Mr. Willoughby if he had been anywhere at one particular time?"

"I don't know. I never ask him anything about his private affairs."

"Would you call me impertinent if I asked you if you had been to Rome?"

"No, of course not."

"Then why not inquire if Basil has been to Monte Carlo?"

"He would suspect me of some purpose in the question, and—and I don't choose to"—falling back on a woman's frequent resource—a negative without a reason.

"Oh, let me save you even against your will," he cried, impulsively, catching hold of her hand, which she instantly snatched away. "For Heaven's sake, listen to me. I believe that Basil—the man who wins you by gratitude not by love—is—is——" the word stuck in his throat as he met her eyes full of scorn.

"I know what Mr. Fane is," she said, quietly, though her voice was tremulous with passion—"a coward!"

He turned white to the lips.

"Thank you. I am a coward because I don't brazen out the truth like a woman, without waiting for proofs! Some day I shall hold them in my hand—and then—and then," his eyes kindling with overpowering rage and disappointment—"you may throw yourself on your knees before me, but I won't hold them back."

"I shall never do that," standing up with her neck drawn up proudly, her face white as his own.

"I think you will," coming close up to her, and looking into her face with glowering eyes.

"Oh, Flora, if you had loved me it would have been better for both of us."

"Not for me," and she stepped back, repugnance and loathing visible on every feature.

"Good-bye. I trust to your honour not to mention what I have said." Bowing low he turned to the door.

"For your own sake or Sir Basil's!" she asked, scornfully.

"For his entirely." He closed the door behind him and she was alone.

Mr. Willoughby found her still standing with hands clasped and eyes fixed on the floor.

"What did he want with you, Popsy?"

She raised her head and looked round at him, the corners of her mouth drooping.

"He wanted me not to marry Sir Basil."

"Aha! Mr. Philip Fane wants every good thing for himself; but he would never have you, with my consent, if he were the Baronet instead of the other."

CHAPTER XXX.

That night Mr. Fane abruptly left the Abbey and returned to London. There were few to regret him, for Sir Basil only tolerated him, and Eustace Trevanion had taken a violent dislike to him. He felt instinctively that he was Sir Basil's enemy, and suspected him of some foul design. Therefore he breathed more freely when he was out of the house, though sometimes he was sorry not to have him under his eye where he could watch what he was up to.

Meanwhile the preparations were being hurried on, and the wedding-day was fixed for the seventeenth of September. Flora Trevanion was not allowed much time to think, and for this she was thankful, as she felt matrimony was such a fearful leap in the dark, that unless it were taken quickly her courage would be likely to fail her. Sometimes when lying awake in bed, her brain too unquiet to admit of sleep, it would strike her as strange that she was, as it were, to be finished off and done with before she had had time for the love-dreams in which most girls indulge.

Sir Basil had come suddenly into her life which had been so simple and conventional till his appearance—with Frank Rivers for her only particular friend, and a game of tennis, or a dance at home for her principal excitements; and now after bursts of tropical storms, such as on the day of the picnic, and gleams of glorious sunshine, as when he drew her to him, and told her that her brother might be cured without the terrible surgeon's knife—now they were to be linked together for ever, in spite of the cloud that hung over him, in spite of those secrets of his unknown past!

He came from day to day, and everyone noticed what a change had come over him.

Years seemed to be taken off his age. Instead of thirty he looked like twenty-five; his face lost its sternness, and his dark eyes were as happy as a boy's. He gave her jewels till she laughingly told him she would soon be able to set up a jeweller's shop, and he treated her with deferential tenderness as if his bride were a queen.

Mrs. Willoughby told him that he would turn the child's head, but it had no effect.

She told Flora that his way of going on was quite absurd. Anyone would think that he was marrying some one far above him, when she had no money and no title, and he had both, but she didn't get any answer.

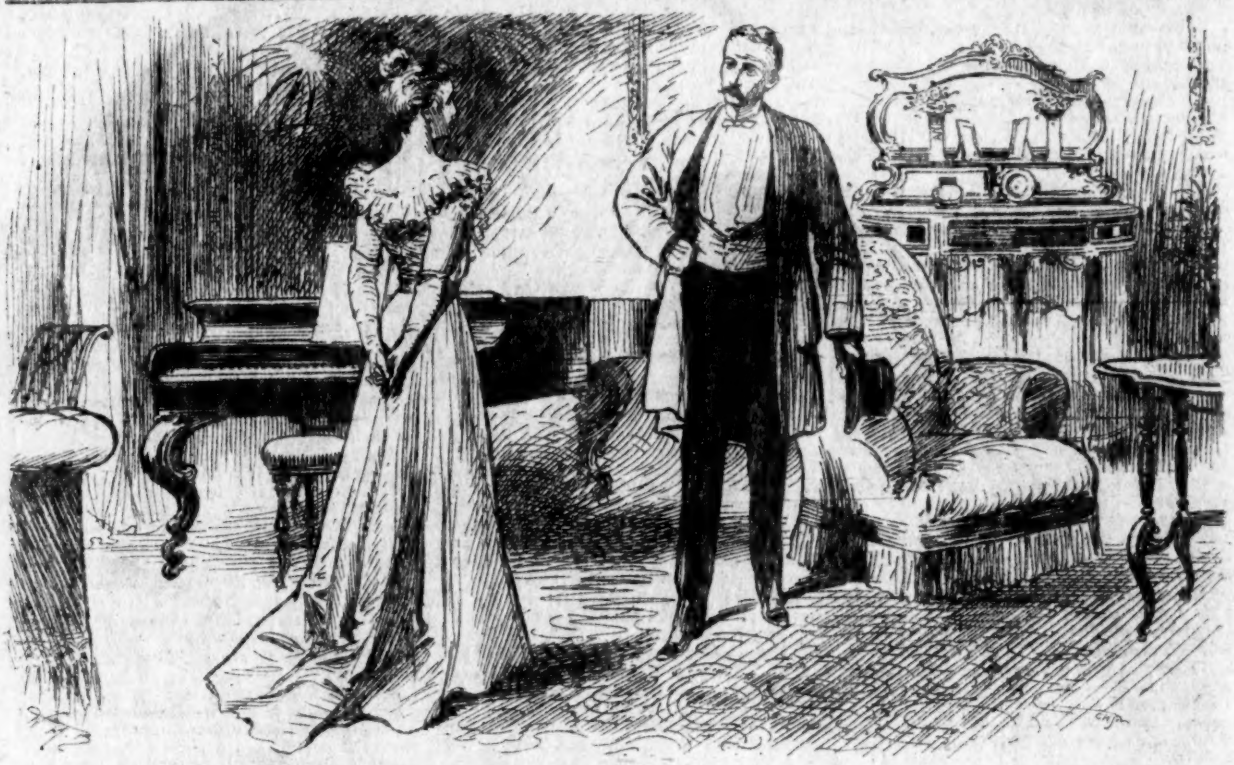
Flora was too bewildered to be quite happy, and when alone with her lover she shrank so shyly from his caresses, that sometimes a shadow crossed his face as a fear darted through his mind: "Doesn't she love me after all?"

Lady Rivers came to call and offer her congratulations. If she had ever wished to secure Sir Basil Fane for her son-in law she betrayed no sign of it in her manner, but kissed Flora gently on both cheeks, and said she was glad to think that as Lady Fane she would be a neighbour for the rest of her life.

Nesta Rivers murmured her good wishes in a shy undertone, but squeezed her hand so tight at the same time that the diamonds in her engagement ring nearly dug a hole in her fingers.

She did not look at all disappointed, indeed Flora suspected that she was glad to think that Eustace Trevanion was not likely to leave the neighbourhood when his sister was established at the Abbey.

A new hope sprang up in her heart. Now that there was a chance of Eustace being cured, he might be soon looking out for a wife himself,



"ARE YOU ENGAGED TO MY COUSIN?" ASKED MR. FANE.

and who could make a fitter or more appropriate wife than the gentle, tender-hearted girl, whose heart had gone out to him with womanly compassion when other people disdained the cripple!

Nesta was to be one of the bridesmaids, with Emily and Jane Willoughby, Alice Winder and two others, Miss Evelyn and Miss Emmeline Fane, cousins of the bridegroom. Their dresses were to be of pure white, which had just come into fashion when cream's long reign was ending, and their small bonnets were almost entirely composed of tiny ostrich feathers and pearls.

Flora's trousseau was furnished by the principal tradesman in Hardchester, for she said she did not care in the least for grand, high sounding French names, and much preferred to give her own neighbours a chance.

This put them on their mettle, and the dresses were turned out to perfection, with every frill and bow and flounce of lace finished off in a most superfine manner. Of course the wedding-dress was an exception; that came from Melanie's in Regent-street, and was a most cunning combination of simplicity and beauty.

Jenny and Emily were delighted with the presents Sir Basil gave to the bridesmaids—diamond brooches in the shape of an arrow—as the latter especially wondered what Edgar Winder would think of it. Perhaps he might make an allusion to Cupid's arrows and having got so far go on to a proposal, and then Flora would not be the only bride in the place, though the match would not be such a grand one.

There was no end to the hopes and fears which this marriage between the daughter of Lionel Trevanion and the richest man in the place gave rise to. But most people kept them to themselves, and the surface of life was tolerably unruffled.

The wedding-day dawned dimly, the sun a red ball hidden in a fog, and every leaf and flower and tree dripping as after a heavy shower of rain.

"Oh, such a day, Flo!" and Jenny bounced into her bedroom with all her light-brown hair hanging in a dishevelled mass over her shoulders. "I feel inclined to cry."

"Don't, you'll spoil your looks; red eyes won't do with a white bonnet," and the bride-elect tried to smile, though her heart felt oppressed with care on this, the most important, day of her life.

She wanted to be alone as she went on with her toilette, but this Jenny would not allow. She had evidently something on her mind, which she had a difficulty in bringing out, and fidgeted about the room, taking up the dainty satin shoes with the pearl buckles, inspecting the wedding-dress with its frills of real Brussels lace, admiring the diamond stars which were to fasten the veil.

"You won't be ready if you don't go," Flora said, gently, though she was dying to get rid of her.

Then Jenny came a little nearer, and bending over a pair of twelve-button gloves which were lying on the table, said, in a hurry and a flutter,—

"I never told you—Frank told me to say that he would never forget you. All nonsense, you know, because young men always do."

"Yes, all nonsense," said Flora, slowly; and then old nurse and the housemaid came in followed by Mrs. Willoughby, and took possession of the bride, whilst Jenny with a very red face escaped.

This message had been entrusted to her when Frank found that he hadn't a chance of seeing Flora again before he went; but for reasons of her own she had kept it back, and only told it now because her conscience pricked her so uncomfortably.

The wedding-dress was on, the bracelets fastened, the last touch given to the small spray of orange blossom nestling amongst the brown curls, and all those who, on some pretext or other, had crowded into the room, stood in a circle round the bride in breathless admiration.

Envy and jealousy were both forgotten, for she conquered them all by the magic of her beauty.

Winter came up the stairs and had a good peep before he delivered his message.

Mr. Willoughby turned round and saw him.

"Well, what is it?"

"A shabby-looking fellow, sir, wanted to see Miss Flora, but I told him 'twasn't possible."

"Did he give any name?"

"James Carter, sir. Said something about a picnic, and said the lady would remember."

"Has he gone?" Flora asked, eagerly, as the colour rushed into her face.

She could not tell if she were glad or sorry when the butler said he had gone. The wild curiosity of Bluebeard's wife was upon her, and yet—and yet—it might be better if she never knew.

Jenny and Emily looked at her in surprise. It seemed to them a very unorthodox thing for a bride to be interested in everyday affairs, such as a stranger's call.

"Mr. Trevanion's waiting, miss."

Then the bridesmaids in their frills and furbelows scuttled downstairs, jumped into the carriages and drove off in a flutter.

Mrs. Willoughby came next, and one or two dowagers, then followed the bride with her guardian opposite to her, her brother by her side, his hand clasped in hers.

As she went up the crowded church she was trembling as if with fear, but as she stood by Sir Basil's side and heard his full rich voice saying each response as if he were so glad to make it, a great calm came over her, and her troubled heart was at rest.

No one noticed the shabby figure crouching behind a pillar, or heard the savage curse he muttered as the bridegroom passed,—

"May he lose her as soon as he's got her! May he die when he's happiest—curse him!"

(To be continued.)

SHE THREW FORWARD HER LEFT HAND, DISPLAYING THE RING UPON THE THIRD FINGER.

THE MISTRESS OF LYNWOOD.

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CHAPTER X.

LYNWOOD HALL was *en fête*, and even a casual observer, who knew nothing of what was happening, could not fail to have been struck with its gala air. Flags hung from the windows, wreaths of laurel and flowers were above the principal entrance, while triumphal arches and Chinese lanterns in all parts of the grounds bore witness to the general rejoicing that was taking place in honour of the return home of Sir Ralph Lynwood and his young bride.

It is needless to say that much curiosity and gossip had been excited in the neighbourhood at the news of the Baronet's marriage, and the comments had not been altogether of a flattering nature with regard to Lady Lynwood.

"An artful young woman, who has married Sir Ralph for the sake of his money and title!" people said, shaking their heads sagely, and then they spoke in lowered tones of Otho Lynwood, and wondered how he liked having his chances of heirship thus cut off.

If he resented it he contrived to veil his feelings admirably, for it was he who directed all these preparations for welcoming his uncle—he who ordered the bells to be rung, the arches to be erected, and who acted as general superintendent of the whole affair.

"Of course it was a disappointment to me, in a degree," he acknowledged, frankly, when someone ventured to hint that he could hardly have regarded the marriage with unmixed satisfaction; "still, on the whole, I don't know that I am altogether sorry. My uncle's one of the best men in the world, and has behaved like a father to me all my life, so I have surely no right to grudge him happiness, even though it be at my own expense."

This philanthropy raised Captain Lynwood wonderfully in the estimation of the neighbourhood, which unanimously declared he bore his downfall in a most Christian-like manner that deserved every sympathy, for, disguise the facts as you will, there is no disputing that the probable loss of a baronetcy and fifty thousand a-year is enough to disturb the equanimity of the most unselfish of men!

"I think everything is complete now, Richards," he observed to the butler, throwing a comprehensive glance round. "You have told Mrs. Gibbs to have all the maid-servants in the hall?"

"Yes, sir; and you needn't be afraid but what they'll be there, for they're all dyin' with curiosity to see the new mistress of the hall," responded that functionary, and Otho winced slightly at the last words as if they stung him.

He went to the door and looked out, but as yet there was neither sight nor sound of carriage wheels. It was a lovely afternoon, the sunlight lying in a widespread glory on the leaves, the beds and borders bright with a blossom blaze of crimson and yellow, while the skies above were cloudlessly blue. Lynwood Hall was at its best, and Otho's eyes lingered on its beauties with curious intentness—as if, though accustomed to them all his life, he now saw them in a fresh light.

"A fine heritage—to lose," he muttered to himself, and added, with an unfathomable smile, "or to win back again."

He had thought long and pondered deeply over his position before he resolved on the line of conduct he should pursue. Reproaches addressed to Sir Ralph would, he knew, be of no avail; nay, would only injure his case, for the Baronet would very naturally affirm that he had a right to please himself, and the fact of his not having married till late in life concerned no one else—and this it would have been impossible to contradict.

The officer's subtle brain revolved many problems, and at last he determined on treating the affair as if it were quite a matter of course and he had not the shadow of a right to resent it. Accordingly he wrote a letter to his uncle, in which he offered his most sincere congratulations, hoped he would be very happy, and ended by expressing the wish he felt to see his new relative.

The latter statement was no fiction, for he had, indeed, the greatest desire to know what sort of a woman he had to fight; and in spite of his self-possession his heart beat a little faster, and his cheeks grew a little paler, as the pair of greys which drew the stately barouche were pulled up at the door and he saw his uncle pleased and smiling sitting by the side of a lady—a lady so young that she looked a mere child, so delicate and ethereal that she reminded one of a snowdrop's fragile petals.

She seemed a little shy and frightened at all the fuss and parade that had been made since their arrival at the station—she had been travelling all day, and fatigue and excitement were beginning to tell on her, and made her look whiter than usual.

"Welcome home, Uncle Ralph—and you, too, Lady Lynwood!" exclaimed Otho, coming forward and assisting them to alight, and he wrung the Baronet's hand with the hearty clasp of true friendship, while he respectfully raised that of Adrienne to his lips.

"Kiss her, Otho, kiss her!" exclaimed Sir Ralph, delighted with the spontaneous warmth of this reception. "She is a relative, you know."

"I do not need a second permission," answered the young man; and bending down saluted Adrienne's cheek.

A strange shiver passed through the girl's whole body as he touched her. Was it some presentiment of the evil that in the future should come to her through his agency?

On his arm she passed through the line of servants drawn up in the hall, and headed by the housekeeper, who was very stately in a black silk gown and cap, elaborately adorned with white satin ribbon.

Mrs. Gibbs was far from pleased at the notion

of Lynwood having any other mistress than herself; and when she saw how young that mistress was her indignation greatly increased, and she repeated for the hundredth time that "Sir Ralph had made a fool of himself in his old age!"

Unconscious of the unfavourable criticism on the part of the housekeeper, or the admiring regards of the other servants, Adrienne went on to the smallest of the reception rooms, where tea was already set on a small gipsy table.

"I thought Lady Lynwood might be tired, and would like a cup of tea before dinner, so I ordered it," observed Otho.

"Very thoughtful of you," commented the Baronet; "only you must address my wife in a less formal manner than 'Lady Lynwood,' or I am sure she will feel hurt."

"Yes, indeed!" acquiesced the young girl.

"Certainly, I will call her what you like," said Otho, pleasantly; "but you must give me proper instructions. It will hardly do to say 'Aunt,' will it?"

Adrienne burst into a little ripple of laughter—as sweet and clear as a peal of silver bells.

"That would be too funny! No, you must call me by my Christian name—Adrienne."

"So be it, and I thank you for your kind permission. It is such a pretty name—as you pronounce it!"

Presently, after she had finished her tea, the young wife went upstairs to change her dress, and the two gentlemen were thus left alone.

"Well, Otho, what do you think of my bride?" asked Sir Ralph, as the door closed.

"She is charming!" was the enthusiastic answer. "She is as fair and sweet-looking as a flower."

"Is she not!" exclaimed the Baronet, with fond pride; "and more than that, her soul is as pure and innocent as that of a young child. She is perfectly free from knowledge of the world and its wickedness, and views everything through the medium of her own purity. A gentler, tenderer, more guileless nature it was never my fortune to meet. Evil to her is as abhorrent as to the angels."

"But even angels fell!" muttered Otho to himself, with an evil smile that his moustache hid. Aloud he said,—

"I believe you, uncle. I have not much faith in womankind generally, but I will make an exception in favour of this one."

"Don't be cynical, my boy; time enough for that when you get an old man, and the world has shown you its shady side. By the bye, Otho, I owe you a good many thanks for your letter and the way in which you have taken my marriage," he added, his manner growing slightly embarrassed. "I assure you it has given me a very great deal of pleasure to know how disinterested are your feelings towards me."

"My dear uncle, what right had I, of all men in the world, to complain, when, as a matter of fact, I owe everything to you!"

"I know, I know; but some people would have looked at the matter differently—especially as I had led you to suppose it was my intention never to marry—as, indeed, it was. But you see, Otho, even old men are not proof against Cupid's power; and I believe I am as much in love as a boy of seventeen or eighteen."

"Old idiot!" was Otho's mental comment on this confession; but he smiled pleasantly in his uncle's face as if in gentle indulgence of an amiable weakness. "Well, you have a very fair excuse," he observed, in answer.

"I cannot make out how it is I was so well satisfied with single blessedness," went on the Baronet. "Most decidedly those men are happiest who have given hostages to fortune in the shape of wife and children. It would have been better had I married earlier, but I am not too old to look forward to seeing sons and daughters grow up at my side."

Otho turned away and looked through the window; and it struck Sir Ralph that his speech was rather wanting in tact at that precise juncture.

Luckily, the pause that ensued was broken by the entrance of Adrienne, who had changed her travelling dress for one of white cashmere, made quite simply, in straight folds that fell in graceful lines round her slender young form, and suited her beauty to perfection.

"You only want a halo to make you look like a mediæval saint!" exclaimed Otho, gaily; and immediately afterwards the butler announced that dinner was served, and they all adjourned to the dining-room—a stately apartment panelled in oak, and hung round with family portraits.

"How do you like your rooms?" asked Otho of Adrienne, when they were seated.

"They are charming—so light and fresh and elegant!" she exclaimed, with the childish enthusiasm that was perfectly natural to her.

He bowed and looked pleased.

"I am very glad they meet with your approval. I did not know your taste, so I had to exercise a considerable amount of discretion in selecting the furniture."

"Did you select it, Otho?" asked Sir Ralph.

"Yes. Mrs. Gibbs came to me in great distress, saying you had sent orders to get the suite of rooms in the west wing ready for Lady Lynwood's occupation, and as they required a great many alterations to make them decent she was at her wits' end, so I undertook the responsibility myself."

"Which was more than good of you. I'm sure I don't know how we can thank you for the trouble you have taken in our homecoming."

"That task repaid itself," said the officer, gallantly, and glancing at Lady Lynwood, in order to point his compliment.

"Now tell me what has been happening since I have been away," said Sir Ralph, more pleased than ever with his nephew's conduct. "You must have quite an accumulation of gossip."

"I have heard very little—but then you must remember I have only been here a week."

"Still, you can learn a good deal in a week."

"Perhaps I have been remiss in seeking intelligence then, for certainly I know very little. By the bye, there is one piece of news, now I come to think—Nathalie Egerton is engaged."

"Pretty Nathalie engaged! Well I suppose that is not a matter for surprise. But who is the lucky man?"

"A Mr. Farquhar."

"What Farquhar?" inquired the Baronet knitting his brows.

"He is a financier, and a very rich man, but people down here are inclined to look coldly on the match, which, they say, is one of convenience only."

"I am sure I hope not, for Nathalie is one of the most charming girls I know, and certainly deserves a happy future."

"She will probably enjoy a happy one," observed Otho, with a cynical laugh. "Did I not tell you the man was very rich, and will not any woman sell herself for the wealth that carries her into the paradise of jewels and fine clothes and opera boxes and admiration?"

Sir Ralph frowned his displeasure at the speech, which he did not answer. He was inclined to think Otho rather wanting in tact now.

"Has her brother come home yet?" he asked presently.

"What, Lionel? No, he was to have been here some time ago, but he contrived to fall down in Brussels, and broke his leg, so he has been a prisoner there ever since. I believe, however, they expect him back immediately."

"What name did you say?" demanded Adrienne, in a tremulous tone.

"Lionel Egerton. Do you know him?"

She coloured all over her delicate face, and both men regarded her so curiously and so intently that her embarrassment naturally increased.

"No, that is, yes. I have met him at least," she stammered, incoherently, and wondering whether they would think she had done a very heinous thing in permitting him to escort her when he had not been introduced to her.

"Where did you meet him?" asked her husband, with some asperity.

"In Brussels."

"At your school?"

"Oh, no! He rendered me a service once. I will tell you about it some other time, not now," she answered hastily, and after this Sir Ralph could not press her.

Nevertheless, the incident was not forgotten either by him or his nephew, and, trivial as it was, it was yet destined to make an indelible impression on both their memories.

CHAPTER XI.

The next few days were mostly taken up in receiving and entertaining the visitors who flocked to Lynwood Hall, anxious to see its young mistress, and discover what manner of woman this "old man's darling" was.

The verdict they passed was very favourable. Although Adrienne had seen nothing of the world, and knew nothing of fashionable manners, she had a quiet, unconscious dignity that was innate, and which supplied the place of experience.

People were charmed with her delicate, flower-like face, and the sweet tranquillity of her smile, and whatever mercenary motives they might formerly have imputed to her for consenting to marry a man old enough to be her father, they now declared she had been actuated by no other consideration than her affection for Sir Ralph.

And, indeed, the young girl was very happy at this period. For the first time in her life she enjoyed perfect liberty of action, and she revelled in it like a bird which has suddenly been set free from the narrow limits of a cage, and can fly whithersoever he will in the wide air of Heaven.

She was surrounded by every luxury Sir Ralph's fondest could suggest, and she enjoyed the pretty and tasteful objects lavished upon her with the enjoyment of a young and artistic soul to which their possession is a novelty. The strangeness of her position soon wore away, and she quickly grew accustomed to hearing herself called "my lady," and to the feeling that she was the person of most importance in the household—one whose will was law, and whose slightest caprice must be obeyed.

Some characters might have been spoiled by the change, but hers was so utterly sweet and unselfish, so entirely devoid of the grosser elements, that the only result of her new dignities was a girlish delight and happiness, beneath whose influence her nature expanded like that of a flower which has been kept in the dark and is suddenly brought into the sunshine.

It was pretty to see her running about the house in her white dress, and with her shining hair falling in a golden cloud over her shoulders, for Sir Ralph would not permit her to bind it up, which he said would hide its beauty. He had bought her a little carriage and pair of ponies, and these she was never tired of driving about, while her husband sat at her side, looking at her with admiring eyes that never wearied of watching her sweet, changing face.

Her affection for him was very true, very sincere; and if it was that of a child for a parent, rather than a wife for her husband, she was too innocent to know the difference.

Frequently Otho would accompany her in her walks and drives, and on these occasions nothing could exceed the assiduity with which he endeavoured to amuse her. He was an agreeable companion, for, of course, he knew the neighbourhood thoroughly, and was able to point out to her all the spots of interest, and give her the history of the county families, and Adrienne was very grateful for his kindness and the efforts he made for her pleasure.

"I am sure I do not know why you should take so much trouble for me," she said to him once, with naïve simplicity.

"I assure you your society is a great pleasure to me," he immediately replied. "All my life I have wished for a sister, and you, in some measure, supply the place of one towards me."

"Do I? I am very glad."

"A female friend is a great boon to any man," he went on, with his unfathomable smile, "and, in the present state of society, it is impossible for

two members of opposite sexes to be friends unless they are relatives."

"Is it?" she said, surprisedly, "I do not see why it should be impossible."

"Then you believe in platonic affection!"

"Certainly I do. If people have tastes and sympathies in common I do not understand why they should be debarred from each other's companionship because they happen to belong to different sexes."

Otho shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see why they should either, but you see the world has put its veto on such friendships."

"Then defy the world!"

He laughed again, but a strange gleam shot into his eyes. He had set himself the task of gauging the character of his uncle's wife, and each revelation was carefully treasured up in his memory for future use. Simple and innocent as she appeared, it was yet not the simplicity of weakness, and there were depths in her nature that had never yet been sounded, and of whose existence she herself was ignorant. She had infinite capabilities of love, of suffering, and of devotion, but these forces yet slumbered, waiting for the magic of an enchanter's wand to wake them into life.

Nathalie Egerton had been one of the first to call at Lynwood Hall, and she and Adrienne had immediately taken a great fancy to each other. The latter had said nothing of her meeting with Lionel, and had listened attentively, but without remark, when Nathalie told her they expected him home on the following day.

He really came this time, in spite of his sister's declaration that after so many disappointments she would not believe in his presence until she actually felt his arms round her.

"I was growing quite hopeless. You have been coming so many times, and have disappointed us at the last moment," she said, when the first greetings were over, and brother and sister sat together on the couch, his arm twined fondly about her waist, while his eyes gazed tenderly into hers.

"It was not my fault, my broken bones refused to join, and the doctors said unless I kept myself quiet I might go limping about the world for the rest of my days," he said; "and as that was a contingency I did not wish to face, I thought I had better make the best of a bad job and stay where I was. I need not say how anxiously I was looking forward to seeing you after this long time," he added, kissing her.

"It is a long time, is it not? And the years have improved you wonderfully. Do you find me much altered?"

"Yes; you were a child when I left, you are a beautiful woman now. But it seems to me, Nathalie, you are pale and thin, and you look as if you were very much worried!"

A bright colour leapt to her cheek, and faded as suddenly.

It was true; she felt more than worried, but it was far from her desire that he should guess the reason of her trouble.

She played restlessly with a ring she wore on the third finger of her left hand, and this, at length, attracted his attention, and he bent down to look at it.

"What splendid opals!" he exclaimed. "But you should not wear them—they are unlucky for people not born in October."

"Are they? Fortunately I am not superstitious."

"But what is the meaning of this ring, Nathalie? Are you engaged?"

She answered in the affirmative, without raising her eyes.

"And you never told me!" he said, reproachfully.

"I have had no opportunity of doing so, for the engagement is quite recent," she answered, hastily, and then told him the name of her *fiancé*, but said nothing of the position in which he stood towards her father.

In spite of all her efforts to conceal it, there was a certain restraint in her manner as she spoke of her betrothal that Lionel was quick to observe.

He fancied there must be some mystery, but whatever it was, she clearly wished him kept in ignorance, and so he made no further remark beyond congratulating her, and wishing her all future happiness.

"You cannot think what a delight it is to me to be at home once more," he said, as he went to the window and looked out, while she joined him and leaned on his shoulder. "In my dreams, when I was far away, I so often saw the old house and the avenue leading up to it, with the sunlight playing on the leaves. Ah, Nathalie! there is no place like home!"

"But there are very few homes as beautiful as ours, Lionel."

"No; it is indeed a place to be proud of!" he answered, while his eyes rested fondly on the velvet, smooth lawns, where a couple of stately peacocks were sunning themselves, and then travelled onwards to the park, with its miniature forests of bracken. "I would not part with King's Dene for an Emperor's ransom!"

She looked at him with strange intentness.

"And you would think no sacrifice too great to retain it?"

"None. Why, it has been in our family so long that to part with it would be sacrilege—desecration. I would rather lose twenty years of my life than my heritage. But, why do you suggest such a thing?" he asked, playfully. "Surely there is no fear of its being wrested from us?"

"No fear of it—now," she said, with a little catching of the breath; and he wondered at the expression her face wore as she spoke the words; it reminded him of the picture of a martyr he had once seen, and that had impressed him strongly with a sense of the "faithfulness unto death" it was intended to convey.

Nathalie turned quickly from the window, so that he should have no further opportunity of studying her features, and as she did so, she said to herself,—

"My sacrifice has not been in vain!"

There was no lack of subjects of conversation between brother and sister; each had much to tell the other, and it seemed as if their confidences would never end.

"And are you come back quite heartwhole?" asked Nathalie, playfully.

"Quite," he answered; but she fancied a shade of red showed in his bronzed complexion.

"Do you mean to tell me you have been away all these years and not fallen in love?"

"Oh, for that matter, I have fallen in love half-a-dozen times or more, but the awkward part is, I have fallen out again as readily," he said, laughing. "I fancy my ideal woman must be a very exalted one; at all events, I have not met her yet."

"What is she like—the ideal?"

He paused a moment, as if conjuring up a mental vision before he answered.

"She must be rather tall, rather slight, have golden hair, and eyes the colour of pansies! she must be gentle, gracious, very womanly; innocent and yet intelligent, tender but not weak, and, above everything, she must have a soft voice, that 'most excellent thing in woman'!"

Nathalie laughed.

"You are, indeed, modest in your requirements; and such being your standard, I am not much surprised that it has never been reached—it never could be."

"Yes," he said, dreamily, and speaking more to himself than her, "there is such a woman in the world—I have seen her."

"Where?"

The answer that trembled on his lips died there unspoken. He suddenly seemed to remember himself.

"In a far-off land; but she is a dream, a vision, an airy, unsubstantial nothing!" he said, a strange intonation in his voice, despite its affected gaiety. The memory, whatever it might be, was too sacred to be spoken of, even to his sister; and, as if to evade a further discussion of it, he went towards the door. "I am going to my father—will you come?"

"No; I have some household affairs to see to. Do not forget that I have promised to take you with me to Lynwood Hall to-morrow night. Sir Ralph is most anxious to see you."

"My respect for Sir Ralph is not what it used to be. I had no idea he would ever make such a fool of himself as to marry a young wife."

"Wait until you have seen her, and then, perhaps, you'll understand it better," retorted his sister, who entertained a great admiration for Adrienne—the admiration of one handsome woman for another.

Lionel shrugged his shoulders indifferently. He was not in the least anxious to see her; and, in point of fact, if he thought of her at all it was as an intriguing woman who, for the sake of his wealth, had entangled the Baronet in her toils.

CHAPTER XII.

Lynwood Hall was lighted up from basement to garret, and every five minutes carriages rolled up the approach, deposited their burdens, and drove away to give place to others.

The Egertons' conveyance was a lumbering old family coach that had most decidedly seen better days, but which, if ponderous, was yet very comfortable, and, more than that, had a certain grandeur about it that may have been partially due to the coat-of-arms blazoned on its panels, and partly to its size.

No more distinguished-looking visitors than Nathalie and Lionel Egerton had yet arrived, and as they entered the room she, in trailing skirts of amber brocade, that had been her mother's, and he in plain evening dress, a slight murmur of admiration was audible. They did, indeed, make a handsome couple, but they were both either serenely unconscious of, or supremely indifferent to, the fact.

Adrienne, as they came up, had her back to them, having turned round to speak to someone, so it was only when they were close to her that she saw them.

A sudden light came in her eye, a bright smile trembled on her lips, and her colour deepened perceptibly as she met Egerton's gaze of utter surprise.

"Lady Lynwood, may I introduce my brother to you?" said Nathalie.

"There is no necessity for an introduction, Miss Egerton; we have met before," she replied, and held out her hand, which Lionel took, with a few words indicative of his astonishment.

"But where have you and Lady Lynwood met?" inquired Nathalie, after she had spoken to Otho, who was standing by the young wife's side, and watching this little scene with great interest.

"In Brussels," she responded, briefly, and did not think it worth while to mention under what circumstances their meeting had taken place.

"Quite a pleasant little surprise for you both," observed Otho, and Adrienne answered innocently,—

"Indeed, yes."

After Lionel had spoken to Sir Ralph, and greeted a few other old friends, he contrived to wander off into a small reception-room at the end of the suite, where he found himself alone. This was what he wanted, for he was so entirely taken aback by the discovery of Lady Lynwood's identity that at first he actually failed to realise it. He had known she had left Brussels, for he had watched the school several days when it went for its daily walk on the Avenue Louise, and observed she was not there; but it never entered his wildest dreams to conceive that they should meet again here.

The impression she had made on him was a curious one, and quite unique in his experience of women. She was unlike anyone else he had ever met; her gentle serenity, the innocent naïveté that was not childishness, and the simple candour which, even his short acquaintance had enabled him to see, was perfectly natural to her, had made him set her on a pedestal somewhat higher than he had ever given to the rest of her sex; and so firmly had he held to this idea of her superiority that even now he would not drag her down to the common level, although he had been inclined to pronounce

of Lynwood having any other mistress than herself; and when she saw how young that mistress was her indignation greatly increased, and she repeated for the hundredth time that "Sir Ralph had made a fool of himself in his old age!"

Unconscious of the unfavourable criticism on the part of the housekeeper, or the admiring regards of the other servants, Adrienne went on to the smallest of the reception rooms, where tea was already set on a small gipsy table.

"I thought Lady Lynwood might be tired, and would like a cup of tea before dinner, so I ordered it," observed Otho.

"Very thoughtful of you," commented the Baronet; "only you must address my wife in a less formal manner than 'Lady Lynwood,' or I am sure she will feel hurt."

"Yes, indeed!" acquiesced the young girl.

"Certainly, I will call her what you like," said Otho, pleasantly; "but you must give me proper instructions. It will hardly do to say 'Aunt,' will it?"

Adrienne burst into a little ripple of laughter—as sweet and clear as a peal of silver bells.

"That would be too funny! No, you must call me by my Christian name—Adrienne."

"So be it, and I thank you for your kind permission. It is such a pretty name—as you pronounce it!"

Presently, after she had finished her tea, the young wife went upstairs to change her dress, and the two gentlemen were thus left alone.

"Well, Otho, what do you think of my bride?" asked Sir Ralph, as the door closed.

"She is charming!" was the enthusiastic answer. "She is as fair and sweet-looking as a flower."

"Is she not?" exclaimed the Baronet, with fond pride; "and more than that, her soul is as pure and innocent as that of a young child. She is perfectly free from knowledge of the world and its wickedness, and views everything through the medium of her own purity. A gentler, tenderer, more guileless nature it was never my fortune to meet. Evil to her is as abhorrent as to the angels."

"But even angels fell!" muttered Otho to himself, with an evil smile that his moustache hid. Aloud he said,—

"I believe you, uncle. I have not much faith in womankind generally, but I will make an exception in favour of this one."

"Don't be cynical, my boy; time enough for that when you get an old man, and the world has shown you its shady side. By the bye, Otho, I owe you a good many thanks for your letter and the way in which you have taken my marriage," he added, his manner growing slightly embarrassed. "I assure you it has given me a very great deal of pleasure to know how disinterested are your feelings towards me."

"My dear uncle, what right had I, of all men in the world, to complain, when, as a matter of fact, I owe everything to you?"

"I know, I know; but some people would have looked at the matter differently—especially as I had led you to suppose it was my intention never to marry—as, indeed, it was. But you see, Otho, even old men are not proof against Cupid's power; and I believe I am as much in love as a boy of seventeen or eighteen."

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It was true; she felt more than worried, but it was far from her desire that he should guess the reason of her trouble.

She played restlessly with a ring she wore on the third finger of her left hand, and this, at length, attracted his attention, and he bent down to look at it.

"What splendid opals!" he exclaimed. "But you should not wear them—they are unlucky for people not born in October."

"Are they? Fortunately I am not superstitious."

"But what is the meaning of this ring, Nathalie? Are you engaged?"

She answered in the affirmative, without raising her eyes.

"And you never told me!" he said, reproachfully.

"I have had no opportunity of doing so, for the engagement is quite recent," she answered, hastily, and then told him the name of her *fiancé*, but said nothing of the position in which he stood towards her father.

In spite of all her efforts to conceal it, there was a certain restraint in her manner as she spoke of her betrothal that Lionel was quick to observe.

He fancied there must be some mystery, but whatever it was, she clearly wished him kept in ignorance, and so he made no further remark beyond congratulating her, and wishing her all future happiness.

"You cannot think what a delight it is to me to be at home once more," he said, as he went to the window and looked out, while she joined him and leaned on his shoulder. "In my dreams, when I was far away, I so often saw the old house and the avenue leading up to it, with the sunlight playing on the leaves. Ah, Nathalie! there is no place like home!"

"But there are very few homes as beautiful as ours, Lionel."

"No; it is indeed a place to be proud of!" he answered, while his eyes rested fondly on the velvet, smooth lawns, where a couple of stately peacocks were sunning themselves, and then travelled onwards to the park, with its miniature forests of bracken. "I would not part with King's Dene for an Emperor's ransom!"

She looked at him with strange intentness.

"And you would think no sacrifice too great to retain it?"

"None. Why, it has been in our family so long that to part with it would be sacrilege—desecration. I would rather lose twenty years of my life than my heritage. But, why do you suggest such a thing?" he asked, playfully. "Surely there is no fear of its being wrested from us?"

"No fear of it—now," she said, with a little catching of the breath; and he wondered at the expression her face wore as she spoke the words; it reminded him of the picture of a martyr he had once seen, and that had impressed him strongly with a sense of the "faithfulness unto death" It was intended to convey.

Nathalie turned quickly from the window, so that he should have no further opportunity of studying her features, and as she did so, she said to herself,—

"My sacrifice has not been in vain!"

There was no lack of subjects of conversation between brother and sister; each had much to tell the other, and it seemed as if their confidences would never end.

"And are you come back quite heartwhole?" asked Nathalie, playfully.

"Quite," he answered; but she fancied a shade of red showed in his bronzed complexion.

"Do you mean to tell me you have been away all these years and not fallen in love?"

"Oh, for that matter, I have fallen in love half-a-dozen times or more, but the awkward part is, I have fallen out again as readily," he said, laughing. "I fancy my ideal woman must be a very exalted one; at all events, I have not met her yet."

"What is she like—the ideal?"

He paused a moment, as if conjuring up a mental vision before he answered.

"She must be rather tall, rather slight, have golden hair, and eyes the colour of pansies! she must be gentle, gracious, very womanly; innocent and yet intelligent, tender but not weak, and, above everything, she must have a soft voice, that 'most excellent thing in woman'!"

Nathalie laughed.

"You are, indeed, modest in your requirements; and such being your standard, I am not much surprised that it has never been reached—it never could be."

"Yes," he said, dreamily, and speaking more to himself than her, "there is such a woman in the world—I have seen her."

"Where?"

The answer that trembled on his lips died there unspoken. He suddenly seemed to remember himself.

"In a far-off land; but she is a dream, a vision, an airy, unsubstantial nothing!" he said, a strange intonation in his voice, despite its affected gaiety. The memory, whatever it might be, was too sacred to be spoken of, even to his sister; and, as if to evade a further discussion of it, he went towards the door. "I am going to my father—will you come?"

"No; I have some household affairs to see to. Do not forget that I have promised to take you with me to Lynwood Hall to-morrow night. Sir Ralph is most anxious to see you."

"My respect for Sir Ralph is not what it used to be. I had no idea he would ever make such a fool of himself as to marry a young wife."

"Wait until you have seen her, and then, perhaps, you'll understand it better," retorted his sister, who entertained a great admiration for Adrienne—the admiration of one handsome woman for another.

Lionel shrugged his shoulders indifferently. He was not in the least anxious to see her; and, in point of fact, if he thought of her at all it was as an intriguing woman who, for the sake of his wealth, had entangled the Baronet in her toils.

CHAPTER XII.

Lynwood Hall was lighted up from basement to garret, and every five minutes carriages rolled up the approach, deposited their burdens, and drove away to give place to others.

The Egertons' conveyance was a lumbering old family coach that had most decidedly seen better days, but which, if ponderous, was yet very comfortable, and, more than that, had a certain grandeur about it that may have been partially due to the coat-of-arms blazoned on its panels, and partly to its size.

No more distinguished-looking visitors than Nathalie and Lionel Egerton had yet arrived, and as they entered the room she, in trailing skirts of amber brocade, that had been her mother's, and he in plain evening dress, a slight murmur of admiration was audible. They did, indeed, make a handsome couple, but they were both either serenely unconscious of, or supremely indifferent to, the fact.

Adrienne, as they came up, had her back to them, having turned round to speak to someone, so it was only when they were close to her that she saw them.

A sudden light came in her eye, a bright smile trembled on her lips, and her colour deepened perceptibly as she met Egerton's gaze of utter surprise.

"Lady Lynwood, may I introduce my brother to you?" said Nathalie.

"There is no necessity for an introduction, Miss Egerton; we have met before," she replied, and held out her hand, which Lionel took, with a few words indicative of his astonishment.

"But where have you and Lady Lynwood met?" inquired Nathalie, after she had spoken to Otho, who was standing by the young wife's side, and watching this little scene with great interest.

"In Brussels," she responded, briefly, and did not think it worth while to mention under what circumstances their meeting had taken place.

"Quite a pleasant little surprise for you both," observed Otho, and Adrienne answered innocently,—

"Indeed, yes."

After Lionel had spoken to Sir Ralph, and greeted a few other old friends, he contrived to wander off into a small reception-room at the end of the suite, where he found himself alone. This was what he wanted, for he was so entirely taken aback by the discovery of Lady Lynwood's identity that at first he actually failed to realise it. He had known she had left Brussels, for he had watched the school several days when it went for its daily walk on the Avenue Louise, and observed she was not there; but it never entered his wildest dreams to conceive that they should meet again here.

The impression she had made on him was a curious one, and quite unique in his experience of women. She was unlike anyone else he had ever met; her gentle serenity, the innocent naïveté that was not childishness, and the simple candour which, even his short acquaintance had enabled him to see, was perfectly natural to her, had made him set her on a pedestal somewhat higher than he had ever given to the rest of her sex; and so firmly had he held to this idea of her superiority that even now he would not drag her down to the common level, although he had been inclined to pronounce

a harsh judgment on the girl who had become Sir Ralph Lynwood's wife.

"There are circumstances in the case that I do not understand, but I would stake my life she was actuated by no unworthy motive," he said to himself; and then after a little while, he went back to the drawing-room and stood in a corner, unconscious of how keenly he was watching her.

Every detail of her appearance impressed itself on his memory. She was dressed in some very pale pink material—hardly pink, indeed, but white, in which a faint roseate hue was visible—and in her hair and bosom nestled tuberoses. Nothing could exceed the delicate loveliness of the picture she made, and the charm was heightened by her exquisitely tranquil grace.

"What do you think of my uncle's wife?" asked Otho Lynwood, joining him in his corner.

Lionel started slightly at the question.

"I think her lovely, as other people must also think her," he answered.

Otho raised his eyebrows superciliously.

"Yes, she is pretty enough, but for my part I prefer a little more colour—she is too like a narcissus, or one of those tuberoses in her hair. Don't you think a dash of red in her cheeks would improve her?"

"No, I do not—you might as well try to improve a lily with rouge. She is as perfect as a woman can ever hope to be."

"You are enthusiastic," observed Lynwood, with a slight laugh; "I did not know you were such a connoisseur of female charms."

"I never professed to be, but I have artistic instincts, and Lady Lynwood satisfies them."

"Are you going to stay at King's Dene long?" asked the officer, with an abrupt change of subject.

"Yes, I expect so. You see, it is a good while since I have been at home, so I shan't want to leave it in a hurry."

"No, of course not. Well, I hope I shall see a good deal of you, for I am going to be here some time, and occasionally I find the hours hang a little heavily. The country is all very well in its way, but it's such a deucedly monotonous way after one has been accustomed to town life. Are you fond of tennis?"

"Yes, very."

"That's a good thing, for down here people think of nothing else in the way of amusement. Sir Ralph has an exceptionally good lawn, which I find a great resource. He has altered the grounds considerably since you went away."

"Has he? They used to be very pretty, I remember."

"They are still prettier now. Come over in the morning, and I will take you round the estate and show you the improvements."

"Thanks, I shall be very happy," responded Lionel, marvelling slightly at this cordiality on the part of Otho.

They had known each other from boyhood, but it can hardly be said they had ever been friends, for there were few sympathies or congenial tastes between them, and, as a consequence, they had not seen very much of each other.

But now Lynwood seemed determined to alter the former state of things, for his manner became warm and friendly, and, contrary to his usual custom with men, he even exerted himself to make himself agreeable to Lionel—although not in such a marked way as to arouse the latter's suspicions of any ulterior motive.

Meanwhile, in another part of the room, a different scene was being enacted. Nathalie had been listlessly turning over some photographic views, when she heard her name pronounced, and, looking up, beheld Hugh Cleveland at her side.

Every vestige of colour fled from her cheek, and she made a startled movement, as if she would have run away, but he put his hand on her wrist, and prevented her.

"You shall not escape me this time," he said, in a low, fierce whisper; "I have tried long enough and hard enough to see you, and have hitherto been baffled, but I shall not let this opportunity slip."

"Hush!" she said, regaining her composure, although her voice trembled; "for Heaven's sake do not make a scene—remember how many people there are about who will notice us."

"If you are afraid of that, come out on the terrace; the night is warm, so there will be nothing singular in the proceeding," he returned, doggedly; "I am determined to speak to you, but it is for you to decide how and where."

She hesitated a moment, then rose and took his arm. She was observant enough to see that he was quite resolved to carry his point, and that if she did not acquiesce in his proposal he would say what he had to say in the room, and attention would probably be attracted towards them; she therefore thought it wiser to fall in with his first suggestion, and so they passed through the open French windows on to the terrace.

No one else was there, which was strange, as the night was an exceptionally lovely one. The moon was almost at her full, and under the influence of her beams a silver glamour seemed to lie over the landscape. From the gardens below came the subtle waifs of perfume, and no sound broke the stillness but the faint rustling of the glossy laurel leaves, as a gentle wind crept in amongst them.

Nathalie, standing there in her gold-coloured skirts, and with a black lace mantilla twisted round her shoulders—through whose meshes the shoulders themselves shone like polished ivory—looked even more queenly than usual, and Cleveland's eyes involuntarily softened as he gazed at her.

"I have had a hard battle with my pride, but love has conquered," he said, after a pause, and with a curious bitterness in his voice; "perhaps you will think it cowardly of me to come to you again after your father's rejection of my suit, followed by the letter in which you confirmed it; but somehow, and in spite of that letter, I could not believe your affection had died so soon, and I fancied you might be under some coercion, which was forcing you to act contrary to your wishes. Was I right, Nathalie?"

She did not reply immediately, but looked away from him across the moonlight lawns. When she spoke her voice was very low.

"I was alone when I wrote that letter, and no one dictated it but myself. I told you it was best for us to part—why cannot you accept my decision?"

"Because happiness and I won't part company so easily. Good Heavens, how calmly you speak—as if the question were a trivial one, instead of being a matter of life or death!" he exclaimed, between his set teeth. "I have heard that women are fickle—that their fancies are light as wind, and change equally easily; but I never believed it—I cannot believe it now, although your own words condemn you. Ah! Nathalie, think of what you say, what you do, and then tell me there is some error, some mistake, and that you are still my own true love!"

In his voice, his manner, there was a passion which told its own tale, and who shall measure the strength of the temptation Nathalie felt to cast herself on his breast, and let all other considerations vanish before the great one of justifying his faith!

Her heart was beating as though it would burst all barriers in its efforts to get free; her blood coursed through her veins with a swift vitality born of the excitation of his presence—she would have given ten years of her life just to lie once more in his arms and see his lovelit eyes gazing down into hers, as they had gazed but a few short weeks ago; but a vision of her father's careworn face rose up before her, the words Lionel had spoken the preceding morning rang in her ears, and her resolve to persevere in her sacrifice, even to the bitter end, grew strong once more.

She dared not tell him of the reasons that actuated her conduct, for if he had guessed them he would have combated them with all his strength, and her battle would have to be fought all over again.

It was better to let him think her false, and then his pain at her loss would be less.

"There is no mistake," she said, clearly and incisively, "what I wrote to you I am ready to repeat, namely, that it is quite impossible I can ever marry you."

"But, why not, Nathalie—why not? Cannot you give me some reason?"

"No! It is sufficient to state the fact."

"Sufficient for you, perhaps, but not for me. It cannot be my poverty, for when I told you I loved you, and spoke to you of it, you said it made no difference to you, and, indeed, I believed you too grand and high-minded to be affected by it; and yet, I can think of nothing else. That your father should have objected to me as a suitor for your hand is perfectly comprehensible, although he need not have spoken to me in the way he did; but I fancied that even in the face of his opposition you would have been firm, and have waited until I could claim you."

Poor Nathalie! How willing—more than willing, she would have been to do so, if fate had not interposed such a barrier between them! But this she could not tell him, and so she remained silent.

"I had such faith in you," he went on, "such faith that I would have staked my life on your constancy in perfect confidence as to the issue. Think, then, how hard it is to believe myself mistaken. Is it not difficult for me to imagine that the girl I held in my arms such a little while ago—the girl whose sweet lips I kissed, and who told me that she loved me and would be true to me, let what would betide—is the same who says to me now that all is over between us, and we must part!"

"Difficult it may be, but it is true—why will you not accept it as a fact and leave me!" she cried, passionately, her anguish under the torture of his words almost more than she could bear.

"Why will I not! Because it seems to me I know you better than you do yourself, Nathalie." He seized both her hands, and stood in front of her, so that she was forced to look at him. "Women may change in the course of months, or years, but they do not in a single day, like you did, unless pressure is brought to bear upon them. I tell you, I will not give you up—I will hold you true to your promise, so long as there is no actual barrier between us!"

"But there is," she cried out, in desperation, and she threw forward her left hand, and pointed to the circlet of opals that adorned the third finger.

He staggered back as if he had been shot.

"What does that mean?" he asked, hoarsely.

"It means I am betrothed to another man—it means that in the course of a few weeks I shall be his wife!" she answered, the words falling heavily from her lips, while the opals gleamed balefully in the moonlight.

Hugh put his hand to his forehead, and drew a long, deep breath.

"Who is the man?" he asked, in ominously low voice.

"Gilbert Farquhar."

"He who was talking to you at the window when I came from your father's study? If it had not been for his presence I should have sought you, and spoken to you there and then." He paused for a few minutes, his breath coming very fast while he looked at her, then he said, "I know Farquhar by name; he is a very rich man, and he will be able to give his wife all the luxuries even a woman could wish—carriages and horses, and cashmeres and diamonds, while I could only have given her love! How could I expect to win, with him for a rival? The race was not fair, I started too heavily handicapped, and the result might have been foretold from the beginning. Nevertheless, I staked my all, and lost." His tone changed again—became full of harsh, concentrated passion. "Do you know what you have done, Nathalie Egerton? You have committed murder, as foul as if you had stabbed me with a dagger, for you have killed all that was bright in my life—all that made it worth living; and have lured me on to love you for the sake of adding one more victim to your list of conquests, and then thrown me aside like a worn-out glove—and this with no pity, no remorse. I believed in womanhood as something high, and pure and noble; but you have degraded my idea, and robbed me of my belief, and now I see your sex as they are, vain—selfish,

heartless, and ready to be bought or sold, as the case may be, for so many pieces of gold. I have been blind, but now my eyes are open, and never again will the same delusion have power to deceive me. Perhaps you have done me a service, I do not know; only I would give half my life to have my blindness back again, and the happiness it brought me!"

The last words seemed wrung from him by some involuntary power he found it impossible to withstand, and as he spoke them he turned and looked at her standing there, with the roses and passion flowers above her head, and her yellow silks lying on the marbles of the terrace, a picture that haunted him for many a long day.

"Good-bye," he said, hoarsely, "perhaps the time may come when I shall be able to forgive you; I cannot now."

And then he turned away and left her; going through the gardens on his way home, heedless of the comments and conjectures this unceremonious leavetaking might excite; while she, with a low cry, like that of an animal in dire extremity, slipped down to the ground, and lay there, her eyes closed, her face white as the moonlight.

And here Lionel, who had come to look for her, found her ten minutes afterwards! for the first time in her life, she who prided herself on her strength of nerves and constitution had been deserted by both, and had fainted.

(To be continued.)

SWEETHEART AND TRUE.

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CHAPTER XXI.

"What's past, and what's to come,
Is strewn with husks!"

SHAKESPEARE tells us that "minutes, hours, days, weeks, and years, passed over to the end they were created, would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave."

But they do not do this to Olive! Time is more merciful to her than that, though in her first impassioned grief she may wish to lay her weary head down for an eternity of rest, and pass to where "beyond these voices there is peace."

But, as I say, Time is kinder to her, and only strings seven more days upon his necklace. Seven short, swift-passing days, for Fate has not any intention of sealing up her book so soon. There are still many pages in the love history to be flattered over and read before the white hairs shall come in the tawny hair, the wrinkles carve themselves in the cream-tinted cheeks, and the haven of a "quiet grave" be reached.

But the girl knew nothing of this. She only thought the summer of her life was ended. Then the winter might come as soon as it pleased. Old age and death, which go hand-in-hand, would only be welcome to her now.

Monotonous quiet had once more settled down upon the old water-mill. Everything was just as it had been before, only Alan was absent. Olive had not seen him again. He had irrevocably gone.

Stephen, too, had departed from Moulinot. He had started off quite suddenly one morning; Olive fancied on account of some letters he had received the previous evening by the post, but she had not been enlightened as to the cause, which affected her very little; she was only too glad, too thankful, to be quit of him so soon. The sight of his tall, gaunt figure and dark face was a perpetual offence. She wanted to forget the past, and he reminded her of it, reminded her, too keenly, too bitterly, too sorrowfully.

Neither of the two Dauntes had, however, ever alluded to that fateful day. They knew from the girl's sad face, voice, and weariness of manner, that everything had happened just as they desired, and thought it more polite to remain discreetly silent on those husks of the past.

That Olive had sunk into a kind of dreaming, melancholy lethargy, speaking but little, and then only of necessity, caused them no sort of anxiety.

"It is but a few days; it will pass off. She will come round," was the verdict of the amiable pair, when they discussed the affair together in private with supreme satisfaction.

They intended her to feel so completely in their hands, so bound and wedded to them in every way as to preclude any idea of her being able to emancipate herself, or assert a freedom. That having no other single soul in all the world to turn to, she would perforce instinctively sink into complete submission, to be turned and twisted as circumstances offered, and as they commanded. A most worthy programme.

One sole thing rather harassed their minds at this juncture. That was nothing had been heard of the runaway. True, a short time had elapsed as yet; but it was a necessity she should be found, and comfortably installed once more where she could do no harm.

Then Stephen had received some kind of news which summoned him away from Pont l'Abbaye—nothing of very decided import; but he thought it necessary to go and investigate in person. Hence his early departure one morning during that week, which seemed to Olive like an age, long drawn out, and full of utter weariness.

When he said good-bye before his departure he evinced no lover-like demonstration, much to the girl's relief, merely shook her hand saying,—

"I shall not be away long, Olive. It is a business matter which requires my attention, otherwise I would not leave you. In this case it must be duty first and pleasure after. When I come back I shall expect a smiling face, and a yes! all ready for me."

Then he got up into the little cart, and drove off, without waiting for any answer.

The girl looked after him down the little grass-grown road.

"When you come back," she muttered to herself; "you will not find a smiling face, and a yes! all ready for you. The face from which you have driven all smiles will not be here. I cannot stay here. I must go away, somewhere, anywhere, out into the world if need be; but stay any longer at the mill I cannot. Anything is preferable to a marriage with Stephen Daunt; and if I stay I feel as though in the end they will make me, that I shall fight against it in vain. I am but a girl; what can I do against them? They seem to have wrecked my life. Oh! Alan, if I had but you here by my side, I should care for nothing in all the whole world; but I am alone—quite—quite alone!"

So the morning passed on its way, and then mid-day, and again noon came floating by, and Olive, always with that same yearning regret of mind and body, wandered into the old garden, and to the low, moss-grown wall, which had a fascination for her now.

She could not keep away from it for long together—it seemed to draw her there to dream, and long, and yearn for what was past and over. The quietness of the spot, too, had a charm for her. She knew none would come and disturb her in her sad dreaming now Stephen Daunt was away.

She stood there, leaning her arms on the soft moss patches, and looked over through the apple orchard, with its knarled tree trunks and laden boughs.

While she gazed, wrapt in a melancholy reverie, she saw the figure of a woman in the distance coming along under the apple trees, and in the direction of the old barred orchard gate, dividing the garden.

The figure came along slowly and evenly in a straight line, neither glancing to right or left, looking up at the sky, or at the ripening fruit above her head; and seemed to be making for where Olive stood by the low stone wall, close to the gate.

As she came near the girl saw it was no one she knew—no one belonging to the village. The features were entirely strange to her, and she was not garbed in the Breton country dress, but in a simple ordinary costume, too neat and good for a begging wayfarer, and too unpretending for a tourist or pleasure traveller *en route* through the country in search of the picturesque.

The woman came close up to Olive, and then stopped the other side of the wall.

"Is this a place called Moulinot?" she said, quietly, looking at the girl with a pair of faded blue eyes, from which all colour seemed to have been long since washed out; and, indeed, her whole face was colourless and faded, too, though once on a time it might have been handsome enough—a blonde beauty that quickly goes. Such a one was this.

"Yes," answered Olive, "this is the back part of Moulinot. The front way lies on the other side, round from the road.

"They told me in the village it was somewhere hereabouts. I took what seemed to me to be the quickest way to reach it, for I saw a building in the distance, at the end of the orchard where I came in, which I concluded must be the place I wanted. Back or front way does not much matter to me so long as it is Moulinot. A woman named Daunt—Rebecca Daunt—lives here, does she not? At least, I know she does, I have been told so," ended the woman, rapidly, as if, fearing a possible contradiction from the girl, she anticipated any such assertion by proclaiming it as a known fact.

"Yes, Miss Daunt lives here," returned Olive, wondering at the woman's somewhat strange manner; "do you want to see her?"

"Is she there"—pointing towards the mill—"now—this very moment? Inside that very house?"

"I believe Miss Daunt is at the Convent of St. Ursula just now; but she will be back before very long, I daresay, if you would like to wait to see her."

"Does she live alone? Is there no one with her? There should be a child, a little girl called Olive—Olive Lyster?" said the woman, again a little eagerly, scanning the girl's face with those faded blue eyes.

"I am Olive Lyster, and I live at Moulinot with Miss Daunt," returned the girl, quietly.

"You!" came rapidly from the stranger's lips.

"Are you really Olive Lyster, little baby Olive, whom I used to carry in my arms and fondle? Tiny Olive? But that is many years ago—many long, terrible years, which have been a dream—a horrible dream. I forget how time has passed by,"—with a shudder and contraction of the leaden-hued brows—"let me come in, close to you. I want to talk to you. It is you I have come to see, let me come in," and she pushed the orchard gate ajar, and came through into the garden to Olive's side as she spoke. Then she laid one hand on the girl's shoulder, and fastened a wistful, concentrated look upon the face near to hers.

"Yes!" she said, at last, with conviction, "now I see you close you are Olive; there are the same features I knew so many years ago—the same cheeks I have kissed a score of times, long, long ago. You do not remember me?"

"No, I cannot remember you," returned Olive, slowly, trying to recall a wandering memory of the woman before her, but fruitlessly.

"Of course not. How should you? You were but a babe then, a pretty, brown-eyed babbling thing, and I loved you. For the sake of that time, Olive, will you kiss me now?"

The girl did not hesitate for one moment. The little appeal for love touched her. If this stranger spoke truly, here was someone who had once been her friend, and who seemed to be one still—someone who had loved her in the past, and might love her still. The thought moved her heart in sudden inclination to do as she was asked, and she leaned forward and put her own red lips to the ashen cheek in a gentle kiss.

"Thank you, dear!" said the woman, softly, "thank you for that kiss. I knew you would do it when I asked you. The baby Olive I used to caress had always a winsome, lovable heart, and she has it still; that has not altered in the least I find. Ah! my dear, it is many a long year since I have felt anyone's lips on my poor faded cheeks. At first, when I was taken away, I used to fancy I felt your little arms round my neck, and your lips on mine, but it was all

fancy then. I have had many fancies since, horrible ones!—but they are gone. Those years have been a long terrible dream, from which I tried to wake. I am awake now, and my memory has all come back. I can think, and plan, and remember just as I used to do before that fearful dream came."

The woman threw back her head as she finished speaking, as though casting off the recollection of the nightmare which had possessed her for so long. And a light came into the colourless eyes while gazing at the girl beside her.

"Yes," she went on, excitedly, evidently fired by her own thought, "my memory has all come back to me at last. I am going to use it for your benefit—yours, the creature I loved—and thwart them both, after all. Through that hideous dream it was always in my mind to do it. It was not all senseless raving on my part, though they both made out it was. Ah!" with an angry motion of her hand, "you did not think I was going to awake and frustrate your scheme, most precious pair! But you will soon discover your mistake now. Tell me, my dear," she added, more calmly, "have you had a happy life with them—Rebecca Daunt and her brother?"

Olive looked at her for a moment, wondering what this stranger should know about everything in this way; then she answered, hesitatingly,—

"I believe they have intended to be kind to me. I ought to be very grateful to them."

"They have not ill-treated you, then? Not beaten, or starved, or shut you up? But, of course, they have not, or you would not look as you do. Such treatment as that would tell its own tale without any need of words. Hardship speaks for itself. Still, it is not always deeds alone that hurt one. I know that well enough in my own case. Are you happy now?"

The girl is silent, and the stranger goes on,—

"You do not answer my question. I will put it another way, then. Are you contented with your life—contented to remain where you are now—to go on living with them as you have done hitherto until to-day?"

"Oh, no, no!" comes rapidly from Olive's lips almost ere she really knows what she is saying. It is an impulse of aversion to the idea which prompts the negative.

"You are not happy or contented, clearly. What have they done to you, dear? Tell me. Do not be afraid to do so. I would not harm you for all the world. I only wish to do you good. Confide in me. I am sure I can, and will help you."

Something in the woman's voice and speech seems to wring a truthful response. Olive feels she can trust her somehow—that here is no enemy, but a friend.

How sorely she needs one no soul but herself knows. Instinct guides her answer, as she says, low-voiced,—

"I am not happy—I am miserable and most unhappy, because—because Stephen Daunt wants me to marry him, and I do not wish to be his wife!"

The woman gazes wild-eyed into her face as she ends.

"Wants you to marry him!" she repeats, with concentrated bitterness. "Oh! the villain! the villain! He is married already, and I am his wife."

CHAPTER XXII.

"It's liberty alone that gives the flower of fleeting life its lustre and perfume; and we are weeds without it."

"Yes, Olive, I am Stephen Daunt's lawful wife; married to him before you were born!" she goes on, seeing the girl's look of utter stupefied wonder and horror at this sudden unmasking of a contemplated villainy.

"The wretched wife he wanted to get rid of, and shut up in a madhouse with raving, senseless, violent beings, who made her worse than she would have been. I am not mad now, dear," as the girl gave her a little sudden frightened look. "Do not be afraid of me. There is nothing to fear. I am sane enough now. I was never very mad even at my worst. They treated me shamefully by shutting me up. I was harmless—quite harmless. I would have hurt no one. I used to dream, but they were always quiet dreams that would never harm anyone. As I say, I was never very mad, but they made me worse, those dreadful raving creatures I was herded with. Do you know why they shut me up in a madhouse?"

The girl made a motion of dissent. She had not yet recovered from the shock of this discovery. One blow seemed to follow another with fatal swiftness. Her life, hitherto so uneventful, appeared to have suddenly turned into a whirlpool of doubt, dread, and horror.

If it was all true what this strange visitant told her, from what had she not escaped, and been delivered from! Truly, she found "what's past and what's to come, is strewn with husks."

"Because they were afraid of me. I knew too much; they were fearful I might speak out what I knew, and ruin their schemes. And I meant to; for your mother's sake, dear, and because I loved you, I meant to speak, and they knew it. So they pretended I had tried to murder them both in a frenzy of madness—that it was unsafe for me to be at large—I was dangerous, I must be put away.

"It was a lie that I tried to murder them, that I attempted their miserable lives. I never had such a thought in my mind once. I was only waiting for my chance to speak, and tell what I knew to the one person who should by right know. In a moment of passion I unhappily let my secret thought escape me. From that hour they never let me go from their sight, for they were afraid of me. Then I was soon taken away, far, far away, and shut up.

"I tried to say what I knew, but it was too late. They called it the ravings of a mad woman's diseased brain, and there was no one to contradict them. But at last my chance has come. At last, after all these horrible years!" she cries, throwing up her arms in a kind of ecstasy, while a faint colour burns in the sallow cheeks.

"They thought I should die in the prison to which they had consigned me—die, and make no sign—but I lived to confound their villeness. As my memory came slowly back to me in that prison-house so did I gather all my proofs together. I forgot nothing, nothing; not one single thing in the whole chain. It is complete, even to one single link. I placed it all together before I came to Moulinet to-day to find you.

"I have longed to see you, dear, but I waited to link the chain first lest my chance should be torn away from me a second time, and I should lose it for ever. They cannot harm either you or I now; it is out of their power to do so," she adds, triumphantly, "for I have placed the chain of proof in safe hands. They may do their very worst, but they cannot harm any more. Their evil reign is over!

"Oh! most worthy husband of mine, you little thought it was my doing that took you away this morning on an errand of discovery as you imagined—that the message which caused your departure came through me by other hands. You think you are going to pounce upon your poor unhappy wife, and imprison her again; but how you err!

"My dear," she ends more gently, taking one of Olive's hands in hers, "Stephen Daunt will not want you to marry him now. He will never trouble you with such a desire again. Henceforth you will be free of him—free as the air of the heavens above. Oh! the glory of a freedom, the exquisite sense of being free!" lifting her face towards the sky in a sudden impulse of joy at her own deliverance from the bondage of years.

"'Who then, is free? The wise who well maintains
An empire o'er himself, and breaks misfortune
With superior force.'"

The girl shudders as she thinks of the snare which has been laid for her, feeling how utterly helpless she would have been in the matter.

Her mind is in a perfect chaos of thought as she hears this poor thing before her unfolding by degrees a tale of treachery and deceit—evidently the growth and outcome of many years past, and she recognises intuitively that it is no fiction but solid truth.

How it affects herself, however, as she is also told it does, she has yet to learn. That page in the book of her life has yet to be turned over and read.

Then an idea creeps into her mind that perhaps this woman who calls herself Stephen Daunt's wife, and who knows so much about the past, may also be able to reveal the truth about the secret of her life; and her lips manage to frame some sort of question regarding it with trembling hesitation and dread of hearing a confirmation of Stephen's miserably unhappy story.

"Let me ask you something," she begins, imploringly; "If you knew me when I was a baby, tell me, I entreat of you, who and what I am."

"Have they said anything to you about yourself?" inquires the woman in return. "What have they told you? or, rather, what have they made you believe?"

"That I am a beggar but for them. A child of shame," murmurs the girl pitifully.

"Then they lie!" the woman breaks out, furiously. "They have lied to you for purposes of their own. Your mother was an honourable woman, and I can prove it. I am going to prove it. Listen, dear, a wonderful change is going to happen to you—something you do not expect. It is on its way to you already. A great change is coming in your life."

"A great change coming to me!" murmurs Olive faintly, wondering. "What change?"

"You are going away from here. Going to leave Moulinet. Will you be sorry to go?"

"No, not sorry," answers the girl with a tiny shiver. "I think I shall be glad. I have often longed to go away, when I was not so unhappy as I am now. Everything here makes me feel sad. I shall be glad to go. I have never known any other home but Moulinet, but of late I have been most—most miserable in it."

"You will not be miserable any more; you are going to be very happy, dear. This great change in your life will be a happy one, believe me. It is coming soon—almost at once. As I said just now, it is already on its way. It may reach you any moment. If this place makes you unhappy you need never see it again after to-night, for you are going to leave Moulinet this very evening."

"This evening! so soon!" Olive repeats, after her, still in a maze of wonderment. "Where am I going?"

"To England! to a beautiful place in England!" answers the woman, with decision.

"But how? How am I to go? Shall I have to go alone?" falters the girl, again.

"No, not alone. I am going with you for one, but you will be under the safe protection of others besides myself. You will be well taken care of, Olive."

"And Miss Daunt, Miss Rebecca, will she go as well?" asks the girl, slowly.

"Yes, she will have to go. Her presence will be necessary. She is one of the links of the chain. They must both be there, both of those two; the brother, and the sister, and the wife!" she returns, with a contraction of the brows. "Look dear, there is some one coming for you from the mill."

Olive turns quickly, and sees Nannette running along the path towards her.

"Mademoiselle, little mademoiselle, come in, come quickly!" begins the old woman, a little out of breath with her hurry, and taking no notice of the stranger standing by the girl's side. "Madame is back from the Convent, and two messieurs have arrived and inquired for you. They bade me bring you to them at once. There is something wrong. Madame looks like a thunder-cloud, so black-browed. I do not know why they are come, but it is something of importance, I am sure. Come, then, with haste," ended the old woman, quivering with her excitement.

Her quick eyes had immediately discerned that there was something very much out of the

common connected with the arrival of these two English gentlemen, who demanded to see the little mademoiselle with such an air of authority, and at whom Madame scowled most unmistakably.

"Oh!" broke in the woman, who had been quietly listening to Nannette's excited statement. "so they have arrived. I am glad of it. Did I not tell you they would be here soon, almost as soon as I was, and you see I did not speak falsely. You can believe all I tell you. Go in and see them—they have come to fetch you away from here. You will soon say good-bye to Moulinot now, where you have been spending such a long visit."

The girl pressed her hand to her head.

"I feel dazed," she said, in a helpless kind of way. "I don't understand it all. What am I going to do? Where am I going?"

"Home!" asseverated the woman, with solemnity of voice. "As there is a just Heaven above us, Olive, you are going—home!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"These I have heard relating what was done, ere my remembrance. Now hear me relate my story, which perhaps thou hast not heard."

In the heart of one of England's pastoral counties stands the fine old country-house called "Marleswoode?"

It is the seat of the Bruce family — a splendid old-fashioned mansion set amid a park of glorious oaks and elms, with smiling farm lands round about it on every side, through which a gentle river meanders past mead and wood, field and cottage alike.

Over the country an early autumn richness is falling, as yet untinged by later russet golds and browns—the fading hues of a passing year.

In the library at Marleswoode—a long wide-built and lofty room—looking out over a lovely old garden beautifully kept, are six persons, waiting for a seventh to enter.

It is just over the twenty-four hours since the exit from the Pont l'Abbaye water-mill, and the six individuals have been gathered together this morning for a special purpose. In fact, to put to utter confusion the absent seventh, for whom they are now ready and waiting.

First there is an old white-haired man in an invalid chair by a small table near the window, a a wide embrasure at the top of the big room. This is Sir Gordon Bruce. He is paralysed in the feet, and can only be wheeled about by an attendant who is always within call or sound of the little chased silver bell resting on the table close at hand.

Near to him, so that he can touch her if he pleases, sits Olive in a low-cushioned chair. There is a new sense of security in being near this old man, to whom she belongs, which is delightful to her, and already she is beginning to feel no longer alone.

In the embrasure, farthest from these two, stands the woman who is Stephen Daunt's wife.

The fourth occupant sits in an oak seat at the long leather-covered writing-table in the centre of the library. This gentleman is Sir Gordon's solicitor and confidential man of business, Mr. Draycot.

Behind him, in another chair by the high carved bookcase, is the other gentleman who accompanied Mr. Draycot to Pont l'Abbaye and also returned with him and the others. It is Sir Hubert Colchester, and his presence plays an important part in this gathering to unveil the past.

The sixth and last occupant of the room is Miss Daunt. She sits rigidly erect and seemingly unmoved, opposite Mr. Draycot on the other side of the table, with her usual hard face and uncompromising demeanour. She began by a point-blank refusal to quit "Moulinot," but found it necessary to give in. Since her arrival at Marleswoode she has been interviewed in private by Mr. Draycot, and on condition of her making certain admissions when called upon to do so, she has succumbed to an arrangement which to her, at any rate, will be an advantageous one. Mr. Draycot placed it to her in that light, and she eventually saw the policy of accepting it.

In fact, Miss Rebecca had come over to the winning side, after a lengthened discussion with the astute lawyer, who proved to her the utter futility of fighting, and also, it must be added, strengthened his arguments by promises of a pecuniary reward.

This latter may have been the last straw, and so she turned "Queen's evidence," thinking it on the whole a more paying game than the other. Indeed, Mr. Draycot put it plainly that it was the only way to escape punishment, and so the compact was made.

As the hall clock at Marleswoode strikes eleven a dogcart drives up to the front steps, and Stephen Daunt jumps down, giving the reins to the groom to take the dogcart round to the stables.

The library door is ajar, and the inmates of the room, sitting there silently waiting, hear the new-comer ask the butler where Sir Gordon is, as the man takes his hat from him, and the answer, "in the library, sir."

Then Stephen walks with quick steps to the door, pushes it open, and comes in.

"Good-morning, Sir Gordon. I hope there is nothing amiss that you have sent——"

He stops suddenly in his speech as he sees Sir Gordon is not alone; and that there are five others beside him in the room, and five whom he never expected to see here.

"What is this?" he begins, frowning blackly and casting an evil glance round. "Rebecca;—Olive—and—good Heaven! and you!" his fell glance at last resting on the pale woman by the window.

"And your wife!" puts in the woman quickly; "your wife, Janet Daunt. Yes! we are here."

The rest of the gathering are silent as yet.

"What does it mean I should like to ask?" he goes on, the black frown still on his brow; but though he asks for information in harsh tones he knows well enough what it means—knows that the stake he has played for is lost to him, and that he has plotted in vain.

After many years Nemesis is about to overtake him. He can read it in the different faces of those assembled. The game is up.

Then as they still remain silent, he adds,—

"Is it a conspiracy?"

"Yes, sir," puts in Mr. Draycot, rising from his chair and pushing it back, "if you choose to put it in that way it is—a conspiracy to defeat your abominable designs, which have most unhappily been too successful until the present time, and which will now happily be brought to a conclusion. I beg to tell you, Mr. Stephen Daunt, that you are unmasked, and also that you are a miserable scoundrel and a felon!"

"You are pleased to make use of strong terms, Mr. Draycot. You, as a lawyer, should remember your words are actionable!" Stephen exclaims with an air of insolent bravado.

"And your deeds of being criminally prosecuted," returns the lawyer, quietly. "I think we should win our case against you. But enough, we are not here to bandy words with a blackguard."

Stephen looks round the room, and lastly at his wife.

"You she-devil!" he bursts out savagely, "this is your work, I know."

"Yes," she answers, unmoved, "it is my work. I am glad and proud to avow it."

"Hark you all here!" he begins, furiously, when she ends her calm avowal; "before we go any further it is desirable you should know that this poor wretch is mad. She is a dangerous maniac, and has escaped from her keepers. I can call medical evidence to prove it. She tried to murder me and my sister once, before she was obliged to be consigned to an asylum, from which by some marvellous mad ingenuity she has managed to escape. I warn you she is not to be believed."

"Neither are you if it comes to that," remarks Mr. Draycot.

"Do you authorise this insulting proceeding, Sir Gordon?" demands the man, angrily, of the old baronet. "Is it you who have convened this very extraordinary meeting for the purpose seemingly of treating me to a pettifogging lawyer's abuse? Do you countenance this mad woman's vagaries as though she were a sane and responsible person? If so, you must be in your dotage. To me the whole affair seems utterly devoid of sense. I might demand an explanation, if a mad woman's fanciful ravings were worth any notice. You will find ere long what a folly you have indulged in by listening to them."

To the last he tries to carry a brave front, and ignore the truth, but inwardly he recognises that he does but delay it a few minutes—that the past is going to be raked up, and that he will be able to scheme no more.

"Pardon me, this lady, your wife, has given us a most lucid and clear description of certain events which took place a good many years ago now, and which are not to your credit by any means—a most distinct and lucid account, which has been verified by others. It cannot, therefore, be the ravings of a diseased brain, having no solid foundation in fact. No, no; do not waste your breath in asserting ignorance of why you have been brought here this morning, which is only feigned, for it is useless, and will deceive no one concerned. Look round this room; see those you have injured by your vile scheming and the witnesses to your knavery in the past. Bravado will not serve you any longer now, Mr. Stephen Daunt. Cast it aside as futile," ends Mr. Draycot, with gravity.

Stephen glares round him like some wild beast caught in a trap; then folds his arms across his chest and says, in harsh, defiant tones,—

"O! what am I accused?"

There is a moment's silence in that long, lofty room; no one stirs from their place. Then the lawyer answers, slowly and with impressive diction,—

"You are accused of fraudulently and with malice prepense secluding this young lady abroad, and preventing her from occupying the position which, by birth and heritage, rightfully belongs to her. Also of concealing the knowledge of her existence from her grandfather, Sir Edgar Bruce, whose legal heiress she is—the purpose of such concealment being to secure to yourself, the next heir-at-law after this young lady, the succession of Marleswoode and adjacent property. That is our accusation!"

"Suppose I deny it in toto?" returns Stephen, fiercely. "Suppose I say in my turn that it is all a trumped-up story induced by a mad vagrant's fancies, and which you have all seized upon with avidity as a means whereby you can wrest the succession from me, the only lawful heir! What then?"

"You might say what you please, Mr. Daunt, but it would not alter facts," says Mr. Draycot, quietly. "I should not advise you to say any such thing, for you could not establish it as a truth."

"Suppose I swear that this girl you have been pleased to drag over Marleswoode, at the instance of a dangerous maniac, to be introduced as Sir Gordon's new found heir, is the illegitimate child of a certain Olive Lyster; who was the mistress of Sir Hubert Chichester!"

Sir Hubert starts from the chair where he was resting, and confronted the speaker.

"It's a lie!" he cries, indignantly. "You know it is! Olive Lyster, the mother of this girl, was never what you say! She was the true and honourable wife of my greatest friend, while he lived, Chester Bruce, Sir Gordon's son!"

"Stay one moment, Sir Hubert!" Mr. Draycot puts in at this juncture. "Before we proceed any further, it would be as well to substantiate our accusation, which Mr. Daunt seems disposed to receive and regard with such contumely. For that same purpose we will go back into this history, and begin at the beginning; that is, we will begin at two-and-twenty years ago. What were you, and what position did you hold at Marleswoode twenty-two years back?"

"You seem to know so much already, Mr. Draycot, that I wonder you should consider it

necessary to appeal to me for any information you may require!" is the sneering answer, of which, however, the lawyer takes no heed, but continues speaking with the same clear precision as before.

"You were"—he goes on—"a cousin of Sir Gordon's through a younger branch of the family of Bruce; a man of no standing or profession whom Sir Gordon, out of pure good nature and desire to provide occupation for one of his own blood, though only in a distant degree, allowed to live at Marleswoode as a kind of secretary and manager of the estate, Sir Gordon himself being in ailing health, and desirous of having someone whom he could rely on about him; for his son, Mr. Chester Bruce, holding a commission in Her Majesty's army, was never at Marleswoode for long together, and could not therefore act for his father in the matter of the estate. You, Mr. Daunt, then stood almost in the position of a second son. Am I speaking rightly, Sir Gordon?"

"Yes! I regarded him almost as I did my own son. I believed and trusted him," answers the old Baronet, looking with dignified reproach at the tall, gaunt, black-browed figure, standing with folded arms a little distance from him.

"When a very young man, and before he came to reside at Marleswoode in the capacity I have stated, Mr. Stephen Daunt had married this lady here, to whom we owe so much in the elucidation of this most unhappy history. But she did not accompany him to Marleswoode when he went there after Sir Gordon's offer. In fact, I believe he remained silent on the subject of his marriage, and his wife lived with his sister, Miss Rebecca Daunt, in a little fishing hamlet on the east coast."

"Yes!" interrupts the woman, as Mr. Draycot pauses a moment in his narration, "my husband kept me in the background in those days, and I lived with his sister as you say. For one thing, he was ashamed of me, for I was not a lady born, remember—only an artist's model when he fell in love with me, and because I would be nothing to him but his wife married me, though I was several years older than himself. He soon tired of my beauty. I was beautiful then, though there are no traces left of it now. Who of you at my age, after being shut up for years with maniacs whom you shuddered to be with, would not be as I am now, a faded, wretched woman? I tell you it was an eternity of horrible sights and sounds"—with a shudder. "Another thing why he tired of me was that I fell into bad health. The doctors said it was want of circulation to the brain, and my memory was bad. It had fits and starts of forgetfulness and remembrance, and at times my memory and mind were a blank. Still I was never fit for a madhouse," with energy.

"We can all sympathise with your sufferings, Mrs. Daunt, which you appear to owe entirely to your husband's tender care and solicitude," says Mr. Draycot, with sarcastic inflexion.

"Yes; he soon tired of me, and would gladly have rid himself of me if he could, I know quite well. But I was his wife, and he could not. He used to come and see us sometimes, not often though, and then excuse himself for his silence, telling me to wait patiently, lest I should inquire into his prospects. 'Sir Gordon is a very peculiar man,' he used to say, 'overbearing and tyrannical, and will not be crossed in anything. When once he has made up his mind about a thing nothing can turn him, so I humour him in proportion. If I displeased him he might send me off. I have no absolute claim upon him; and that would mean ruination for me. Who knows what he may do for me? and then, Janet, we will see what can be done.' I could only submit and do as he said. But it is I who am telling the history not you, sir. You have it all down already in writing."

"Well, we will now proceed to another portion of the history. Sir Gordon was very anxious that his only son, Chester, should marry and settle down; for in the event of his not doing so, and having no children, the Marleswoode estate would, after this only son's death, pass away to another branch of the Bruce family, failing whom it might, by some untoward event, fall to this cousin, Stephen Daunt; but that was such a remote possibility that no one contemplated such a contingency at this time, not even Stephen Daunt himself. It was altogether outside the range of probability. Sir Gordon had already set his mind upon an alliance for his son Chester, and fully expected him to fall in with his wishes on the subject; for Chester had always been a dutiful and obedient son, never attempting to cross his father, who treated him in return with the greatest liberality. However, when, during one leave, he broached the wish of his heart, and, in fact, almost made it a command, his son flatly declined the alliance formed for him, and when his father angrily demanded to know the reason of his refusal, alleged that he preferred remaining single, and had no desire to marry at all. I hope I have not placed this portion of the history in too strong a light, Sir Gordon?" inquired Mr. Draycot of the old baronet.

"No, Mr. Draycot, not at all," acquiesces Sir Gordon, sorrowfully. "I own to being harsh and overbearing to my dear son Chester at that time, but he had never set his will against mine before, and it angered me. It has been a matter of very great regret to me since. If I had but been less tyrannical then he might have told me all; and though I own I may have been terribly angry at first I think I should have forgiven him in the end, for he was my only child, and I loved him," ends the old man, with keen regret in his voice.

"Yes, Sir Gordon, it was a pity as things turned out afterwards, I confess," returns the lawyer; "still we are all wrong sometimes. It would have altered events wonderfully, and turned them into a completely different channel, had you known, as Sir Hubert Chichester, who was your son's greatest friend at that time of his life, now informs us your lamented son confided to him in strictest confidence, which, of course, precluded any thought on his part of breaking. Mr. Chester Bruce, on his arrival home, had gone to his friend Sir Hubert, whom he knew he could rely on and trust in any emergency, and told him that he had obtained leave of absence, though at a critical time, which might necessitate his recall at any moment, for the express purpose of breaking to his father, who he feared might be angry at not having been consulted on such a matter first, the fact of his having married out in India an orphan daughter of a brother officer, who died suddenly of heart disease, leaving her without a sixpence or a protector in the world but himself. Was it not so, Sir Hubert?"

"Certainly, Mr. Draycot. Chester dwelt much upon the complete loneliness of this poor bereaved girl, to whom he was tenderly attached prior to her father's sudden death, that literally there seemed to be nothing but to make her his wife at once. So they were married very quietly, without anyone being made aware of it; and as the doctors warned him that she was far too delicate for the Indian climate, where the regiment was then quartered, he had at once applied for urgent leave, and brought her over to England with him. That she was then in some rooms at Plymouth, while he came on to Marleswoode to soften his father in her behalf, so that he should consent to his young wife living there during his absence in India; for he would have to go back for the remaining ten months of foreign service. By confiding all this to me under seal of secrecy, he placed me in the position of being unable to try and ameliorate the situation in any way with Sir Gordon, who, living on the next estate to myself, I very frequently saw, when he seemed to like to talk about his son and my great friend Chester. By my promise of secrecy in the first instance, and also afterwards when Chester left England again, my tongue has been tied all these years. Primarily, on account of my promise, and, secondly, because I argued it could do no good, possibly harm. I can honestly say, with my hand on my heart, that I did everything for the best, according to my light and reasoning."

(To be continued.)

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Almost as soon as bees begin flying in springtime they will search for water. It is absolutely necessary that they have it when rearing brood. In preparing food for the young bees they use water and honey, and if they are not gathering nectar from flowers, but are drawing on the honey in the hive, they must have water to dilute it in the preparation of food for their young. When bees are gathering honey from flowers, the nectar as they gather it contains a large per centage of water. Bees should always be supplied with a convenient water place, and this should be as near the apiary as possible. Watering troughs for stock or large tanks of water are not good places for them to get water, as numbers of them are drowned in such places. A salt barrel or any barrel of light material filled with water, the water constantly and slowly soaking to the outside, makes an ideal watering place for bees, but no opening should be left to permit of them getting inside the barrel.

FACETIÆ.

MRS. WICK: "Who shall decide when doctors disagree?" Mr. Wick: "The coroner, I guess."

WINKS: "Minks has been aging very rapidly during the past few years." Jinks: "Yes, he must be building a house."

"I SAY, father, what is an adult?" "An adult, Jimmy, is a person who doesn't kick out a good pair of shoes every two weeks."

MRS. PECKHAM: "I never told you how my husband proposed to me, did I?" Mrs. Dashum: "No; did he propose to you?"

DOBBS: "Clothes do not make the man." Dobbs: "No; but many a lawyer has been made by a good suit."

CYNIC: "Now that Auntie has broken her engagement, do you still consider her such a saint?" Dejected: "Yes, too good to be true."

HE: "They say, dear, that people who live together get in time to look exactly alike." She: "Then you must consider my refusal final."

"THIS is a hard world," murmured the young man. "Yes," replied she, "one doesn't realise how hard it is till one falls off a bicycle on a slippery road!"

"YES, Bobby, all these beautiful silk dresses of mine came from a poor, insignificant worm!" "Yes, mamma; and papa is the worm, isn't he!"

MRS GADD: "You do not show your age at all." Mrs. Gabb (delighted): "Don't I?" Mrs. Gadd: "No; I see you've scratched it out of your family Bible."

"OH, but he's not a real poet." "Why?" "Here is a place where he makes wind rhyme with sinned instead of blind or find, or something of that kind."

MRS. PECK: "You know very well, Henry, that I'm a woman of few words." Henry: "True, my dear; but the few are shamefully overworked."

"WE don't hear you sing nowadays, Miss Madeline." "My doctor has strictly forbidden me to practise." "Does he live in the neighbourhood?"

ISAACS: "I hear you are trying to change your name to 'Rose.' I hope you are not ashamed of your race." Rosenstein: "Sohl'nly not. But vat is de use of vasting all dot ink?"

VISITOR (to sexton digging grave in churchyard): "Who's dead?" Sexton: "Old Squire Thornback." Visitor: "What complaint?" Sexton (without looking up): "No complaint; everybody satisfied."

NEW BOARDER: "I s'pose you like boarders who will eat anything that's set before them, and not grumble?" Mrs. Slimdiet: "Bless you, no! I'd much rather they'd grumble and not eat."

FATHER: "My son, do you not know that most of the rich men of to-day began poor?" Small Son: "Yes." "And yet, instead of saving your pennies, you spend them." "Yes, father. When I start in life I want to begin poor."

FUDDY: "Honest, now, what kind of weather do you like best?" Daddy: "That is a subject that has bothered me a great deal. On mature reflection I think the weather I like best is the weather we are not having at the time."

SHE: "No, I like you very much indeed; but I can never marry a spendthrift." He: "How do you know I am a spendthrift?" She: "By the way you have been wasting money on me."

FERDY: "In prehistoric days, guide, there were birds two hundred feet long!" Guide: "Ah! If them birds was only as broad as they was long, sonny, them was the days you orter gone shooting!"

STAGE MANAGER: "By Jove, there's a nice thing happening on the stage." Proprietor: "Eh! What's up?" "The hero and the villain are doing their duelling act, and the latter won't die until you signal him that he'll get his arrears of salary at the end of the piece."

HUNGRY HAWKES: "Indeed, sir, I've got a hungry family at home who don't know where their next meal's coming from." Whitman: "Just my case. My wife fell out with our regular butcher to-day."

"PAPA," said little four-year-old Margie, "I think you are just the nicest man in the whole world." "And I think you are the nicest little girl in the world," replied her father. "Course I am," said Margie. "Ain't it queer how such nice people happen to get into the same family.

MISS MAISON: "Excuse my ignorance, but ought I to call you Mr. Bones or Doctor Bones?" The doctor (tragically): "Oh, call me anything you like; some of my friends call me an old idiot." Miss Maison: "Ah! but those are only people who know you intimately."

"NOW," said Mr. Meekton, as he put on his hat and pulled on his gloves, "I must go home and explain to Henrietta." "Is she demanding an explanation?" "Certainly." "What about?" "My dear sir, how do I know! I haven't been home yet."

MR. HANSOM: "I like Miss Sweetie's face. She looks tender-hearted." Rival Belle: "Oh, she is. She has ten of the most disagreable, stuffy old aunts you ever saw, and she's just too sweet for anything with them. I expect when she gets married they'll all live with her."

AMY: "I see you have a new young man visiting you now. He's a professional man, isn't he?" Jess: "My, no! He's too young to be more than an amateur." Amy: "Don't be facetious. What's his profession?" Jess: "Really, I don't know. I believe I'm the object of his calling."

HUSBAND: "What stuff this pudding is! Where did you get the recipe?" Cultured Wife (calmly): "When speaking of directions for preparing foods you should say receipt. When referring to medical prescriptions you may, if you choose, use the term recipe, from the Latin recipere—take." Husband: "I used the word correctly. This pudding is a dose."

"I UNDERSTAND it was a case of love at first sight," he said. "It was," replied the dearest friend of the woman in question. "If he had looked a second time he never could have fallen in love with her."

MRS. MULVANEY: "An' how do yer husband and yerself get along together, Mrs. O'Brien? Good, I hope." Mrs. O'Brien: "Oh, yis; very good, Mrs. Mulvaney. Here we've bin married goin' on six months, an' I ain't had to call in the police but twice."

HOBO: "Hev yer got any kind of a job you want done, lady?" Housekeeper: "I'm sorry, poor man, to have to disappoint you." Hobo: "Dat's all right, lady. I jest wanted ter find out if I could take a sleep in de next lot here widout bein' worried by offers of work."

GENERAL (to officer at the front): "How was it, sir, you halted your men when they were making such a splendid charge on the enemy?" Colonel: "I did not halt my men, sir; someone rang a bell." "Rang a bell! What on earth has that got to do with it?" "Why, you see, sir, the horses belonged to a London tramway company, and of course they stopped."

A TEACHER in a certain school recently received the following note from the mother of a boy who had been absent for a day or two: "Dere Mam, plese eggcuse Willy. He didn't hav but one pare of trowsers, an' I kep him home to wash and mend them, and Mrs. O'toole's cow come and et them up off the line, and that awt to be eggcuse enuff, goodness nose. Yours with respeck—Mrs. B."

JACK: "How did you come out on that bulldog pup you bought?" Dick: "Lost over a hundred per cent. on the transaction." Jack: "Surely not. A hundred per cent. is all you can possibly lose." Dick: "Think so, do you? Well, I paid ten shillings for the pup and then I had to give a boy a shilling to take him out and drown him. If that isn't a hundred and ten per cent. loss, I don't know what you call it."

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SOCIETY.

THE Queen will proceed to Osborne about Tuesday, July 17th, and intends to reside in the Isle of Wight for six weeks before going to Scotland for the autumn.

THE yachting season at Osborne will, it is expected, be a particularly gay one, if the German Emperor and Crown Prince come over for it.

HIS MAJESTY the Sultan of Turkey will celebrate his Silver Jubilee on August 31st next in characteristic fashion. The officials who surround the Sultan are organising a system of "voluntary" presentations in honour of the occasion.

IT is stated at the Swedish Court that King Oscar, next autumn, will entertain at his annual shooting party in the Island of Hven, in the Sound, which is preserved Crown property, the Prince of Wales, the Tsar, the Kaiser, the Kings of Denmark and Greece, with many other Princes.

THE Princess of Wales has a regular museum of the hats and bonnets she has worn during the last thirty years as a leader of London fashions. When the hat has ceased to be of service it is carefully labelled, dated with the season of its use, and put away.

THE young Queen of Holland has been most carefully brought up. She rises very early—between six and seven—has breakfast an hour later, and then attends to her studies. As a little girl she used to receive the same punishment for being naughty as any other child of less exalted station.

THE present King of Spain supplies the only instance of a child who was born a King. He came into the world six months after the death of his Royal father, and at once became possessor of the throne. The young King's sister, Princess Mercedes, was Queen of Spain for six months previous to her brother's birth.

The little Grand Duchess Olga of Russia may be said to be the richest baby in the world. The week she was born £1,000,000 was settled on her, and it is said that this huge sum was safely invested in British and French securities. For in a country like Russia no one knows what may happen to members of the reigning house.

WHEN the Queen is staying in town, the Royal Mews suddenly acquire a very great importance, and it says much for those who have charge of all the arrangements that no accident has ever yet befallen the Royal equipage, though it would be difficult to imagine more widely different routes than that which has to taken by Her Majesty's horses when the Court is in London and that which is traversed by them daily at Windsor, Osborne, and Balmoral. The Buckingham Palace stables were built when George the Fourth was King, but twenty years later, when the Queen and Prince Albert made all kinds of changes of importance to the Palace, the mews were also partially rebuilt. In the fine set of coach-houses are kept innumerable equipages, including the old state carriage. The last time the old carriage was used was on the occasion of the marriage of the Duke of York. It may be doubted whether this Cinderella coach will ever be seen in the streets of London again. Its weight is four tons, it cost nearly £8,000, and was designed one hundred and fifty years ago. It was in the old state carriage that Her Majesty rode to the Coronation.

LIKE the King of Denmark, the Queen is anxious that as many of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren as can conveniently visit her should be gathered round her this summer in celebration of her eighty-first birthday. At least seven of her grandchildren from abroad will visit her at Osborne, whither, too, the German Crown Prince is coming, and there will be many more great-grandchildren beside the eldest son of the Kaiser. At least one child of each of Her Majesty's own children will be with her, and all who are married will in turn bring one of their children, so that there is a very interesting family gathering for the Queen to anticipate.

STATISTICS.

A SINGLE swallow will devour 6,000 flies in a day.

Two hundred thousand seagulls are shot every year round the coasts of Britain.

IT is calculated that the salt and other solid matter contained in the ocean would be sufficient to entirely cover the dry land with a layer 200 yards deep.

GEMS.

ENDURANCE is nobler than strength and patience than beauty.

WE sleep, but the loom of life never stops; and the pattern which was weaving when the sun when down is weaving when it comes up to-morrow.

IT is not enough that in following his occupation the worker incidentally helps the world along; what is required is that he desires to do, plans to do it, and finds a large part of his reward in the consciousness of having done it.

NOT only the gifts which descend upon us, but those which press so heavily upon others, will weigh upon every generous and feeling heart. And here it may seem less easy to bury them in action, because the problems they involve are often hard to solve. Yet this should be, not a cause for useless lamentation, but a spur to us to increase our knowledge.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

APPLE TAPIOCA.—Pare and carefully core the apples whole; set them in a deep baking-dish, and fill up each core with butter and sugar, and to each apple add one dessertspoonful of tapioca; then fill the dish nearly to the top of the apples with cold water; bake till the apples are thoroughly done; serve cold with rich cream sweetened and flavoured with wine and nutmeg.

BROILED HADDOCK.—Select small haddocks, as they are much more delicate than large ones. Put the fish in a frying-pan in cold water skin side up, and bring slowly to the boiling point; drain, wipe dry, rub over with butter and broil to a nice brown. Serve with maître d'hôtel butter, in which pepper, salt, lemon-juice, and chopped parsley has been worked in proportions to suit the taste.

APRICOT SANDWICHES.—Ingredients: Devonshire cream, apricot jam, brown bread, butter. Method: Cut thin slices of brown bread and butter, spread half with apricot jam, then with Devonshire cream. Lay other slices of bread and butter on top, press together, and cut into finger lengths. The apricots in the jam must be broken up, so that there are no lumps, and, if liked, thin slices of cream cheese can take the place of the clotted cream.

LOBSTER SAUCE. — Ingredients: One small lobster, two ounces of butter, one ounce of flour, half teaspoonful of lemon-juice, salt and cayenne, one tablespoonful of cream, if possible, half a pint of the liquor in which the brill was boiled. Remove the flesh from the lobster, and cut it up into neat little pieces. If there is any coral pound it with half an ounce of the butter, and rub it through a sieve. Now take a clean saucepan, put the rest of the butter in, and let it melt; then stir the flour smoothly in and the half-pint of liquor. Stir well over the fire till it boils. Now put in the lobster, lemon-juice, and salt and cayenne to taste. Add by degrees the butter you pounded with the coral, and, if possible, cream. If there be no coral, a little essence of anchovy may be added to improve the colour.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A STATE lunch in China contains 146 dishes.

THE custom of throwing rice at weddings originated in China.

RAINDROPS are said to be hollow, as they fall to entirely wet the circle upon which each falls.

ELECTRIC ambulances are to be used in St. Louis. They will run, when possible, on the lines of the street tramways.

YOUNG snakes are born with fangs and poison-glands in full perfection, and are dangerous even before tasting food.

A POT that cannot boil over has been invented by a Berlin machinist. It has a perforated rim, through which the overflowing fluid returns to the pot.

THE earliest authenticated sea-fight is said to have been that between the Corinthians and the Corcyreans, in which the former conquered—664 B.C.

OYSTERS cannot live in the Baltic Sea. The reason is that it is not salt enough. They can only live in water that contains at least thirty-seven parts of salt in every 1,000 parts of water.

A SAFETY purse for ladies' use has been invented. It has two straps, one to be connected with the ring on the finger, and the other to be attached to the wrist. It cannot be dropped or wrenched away.

STUNTED dogs are very much admired by Parisian ladies. The demand for them is met by at least forty professional "dog dwarfers," who bring up the pups on an alcoholic diet, which has the effect of stunting them.

THE nettle is put to a useful purpose in some parts of Europe by being converted into various textile fabrics. In Dresden a thread from it has been produced so fine and silky that a length of sixty miles only weighs forty ounces.

ENGLAND'S first war-vessel of any pretensions was called the "Great Harry." She was a double-decker, and was built in 1509. She had a capacity of 1,000 tons, carried 80 guns, was 138 ft. long, 38 ft. beam, and cost £14,000.

AN ordinance in force in Chicago prohibits the erection of buildings higher than 150 ft. above the street surface. This does not refer to spires, domes, and cupolas. In streets not more than 80 ft. wide, the height of a building is limited to 125 ft.

MANY deep-sea fish carry searchlights. One species called the chiasmodon emits a strong white light. Another glows with a rich golden light, like a small incandescent lamp; while yet another carries a lantern on its head that emits bright-green rays.

IN a certain class of Russian schools the highest reward given is the initial letter of the Empress's name. It consists of the initials in solid gold, an inch and a quarter in height, on a blue bow. Should its possessor ever become a governess, it will entitle her to a higher salary than she could otherwise obtain.

THE natives of Persia have an odd way of testing a carpet to see if it is a true Persian product. A piece of red-hot charcoal is dropped upon it, which leaves a round singed spot. If the carpet is of the first quality the singed wool can be brushed off with the hand without leaving a trace of the burn discernible.

WERE it not for matter floating in suspension in sea water—minute living organisms and air bubbles due to the breaking of the waves, all of which reflect light—the ocean would look as black as ink, for in that case none of the sun's rays, having once penetrated it, would be reflected to its surface.

MANY fish can produce musical sounds. The trigla can produce long-drawn notes ranging over nearly an octave. Others, notably two species of ophidium, have sound-producing apparatus, consisting of small movable bones, which can be made to produce a sharp rattle. The curious "drumming" made by the species called umbrina can be heard from a depth of twenty fathoms.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

E. M.—Probably in Madras.

Lal.—Not without his consent.

Bob.—No stamp is required on a will.

R. J.—The charge is not unreasonable.

L. M.—Apply to any of the large general booksellers.

Anxious.—You can do nothing unless you employ a solicitor.

Grace.—Soak the articles in salt and water before washing.

A. S.—Advertise that you will sell it unless claimed within a month.

R. M.—We can only advise application to a first-class firm of shipowners.

Doubtful.—Yes, and he ought to do it whether he can be compelled or not.

Querist.—The word "patent" is properly pronounced with the a broad—pä-tent.

A Reader.—The father must either pay mother for child, or take him from her.

Anxious One.—Any furniture on the premises, except that of a bona-fide lodger, may be seized for rent.

L. G.—Apply to the registrar of the church in the parish where the birth took place. He may help you.

Belle.—Borax makes a better washing powder than soda, as it is a neutral salt and will not injure the goods.

William.—Unless your wife refuses altogether to live with you we do not see that you have any legal redress.

A. M.—Iron or steel immersed warm in a solution of carbonate of soda (washing soda) for a few minutes will not rust.

Carter.—It is foolish to have anything to do with foreign lotteries. If you take the risk you must abide by the consequences.

M. M.—You might try melting all together in a sufficiently large vessel standing in a hot-water bath, and when melted run into moulds.

Daisy.—Clean by rubbing them with half a lemon dipped in salt. They should then be washed with pure water, and dried and polished with a soft cloth.

Unhappy.—Any attempt to win the affection of a gentleman from the young lady to whom he is paying his addresses would be a dishonourable proceeding.

R. R.—You may tone down the darkness of the skin over the black stubble by rubbing with cornflour or violet powder, but the result is not very satisfactory.

Amy.—We should advise you to take it to a professional cleaner, who will tell you whether it would be possible to get out the stain, and whether it would dye through all over.

Sam.—There can be nothing wrong in marrying a girl older than yourself, especially only thirteen months. The question to be discussed is the suitableness of the person in other respects.

S. C.—The South African Republic is the correct name of the State; the other is a mere convenience, just as we say Britain instead of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

Curious.—The phrase is used of a person who hesitates to declare his final opinion on a subject; and it generally implies that he is waiting to see which side is likely to serve his best interests.

Bessie.—If you really mean breaking off the engagement, you should certainly return the ring; no girl with any pride would wish to keep it when the engagement of which it was symbolic is broken.

F. F.—It is for landlord to say on what terms he will agree to take house off your hands; law does not force him to accept less than full year's rent, and your alternative in that case is putting in a sub-tenant.

Marie.—To remove grease from carpets cover the spots with flour or dry cornmeal, and pin a paper over it. Repeat the process every six hours until the grease is drawn out, brushing the oil flour off each time.

T. S.—By leaving without notice—unless she had very good reasons for doing so—the girl has forfeited all claim to notice or wages, though it would be only fair to pay her any wages owing for time actually served.

Maudie.—Your thinness is evidently caused by your growing so quickly. Of course, all kinds of farinaceous foods are fattening, but we think that when you stop growing, which should be very soon, you will begin to fill out.

Sarah.—To prevent the juice from pies running over, thrust little funnels of white paper into the cuts on top, through which the steam may escape, and the juice boil up, and then run back into the pie again when it stops cooking.

J. E.—The finger-nails should be trimmed to correspond with the shape of the finger-tips. If your fingers taper at the tips, cut them to a point so that the tip protrudes just above the flesh; if they are round and fat, round them in accordance to the finger-tips, but never trim them too close or allow the fleshy part of the finger-tip to protrude at the sides of the nail.

Interested.—Your friend may be able to secure a minor position with a theatrical company through a dramatic agency, and, if she possesses talent, combined with industry and patience, can gradually work her way up in the profession.

S. P.—Such a sentence as "the French Government" may be used in the singular or plural sense according to the meaning to be conveyed. If you are speaking of the individuals, you would say "they have," if of the Government as a whole you would say "it has."

S. C.—To keep butter cool and sweet in hot weather, fill a box with sand to within an inch or two of the top; sink the butter jar in the sand, and then thoroughly saturate the sand with cold water. Cover the box down tightly from the air. It may be kept in the pantry.

Phil.—There is no means known to us by which you can possibly hope to work your way out to South Africa; shipping companies are deluged with applications from people equally unfortunate with yourself, all eager to seek renewed health and fortune in that land of promise.

M. G.—The Maxim gun is automatic; as many as 620 shots per minute have been fired from it, and it is accurate up to 3,000 yards; if desired, the shooting can be controlled by the pressing of a button, thus enabling the operator to continue firing individual shots as from a rifle as long as he likes.

Anne.—Put them in a saucepan in cold water with a little soda, boil for ten minutes or quarter of an hour, and then wash in clean hot water without soap, rinse and dry. If they were very greasy to begin with, you may need to add a little soda to the washing water as well as to that in the saucepan.

A LOAD OF HAY.

A load of hay in the street to-day,
And its meadow-fragrance sweet
Comes floating in through the open pane
Of my window over the street;
And my heart turns back, o'er the dusty track,
From the city's whirl and jar,
To the fair green fields, and the shady lanes,
And the lake so dim and far.

The sun shines hot in the meadow lot,
With its tossing emerald plumes,
Its sunflowers brave, and its lilies fair,
And its legion of clover blooms.
The sturdy mowers, with shining blades
(How they glittered and gleamed in the sun!),
And the boy with the rake, who trudged in the wake
Of the wagon when all was done.

The ting-a-ling of the cowbell's ring,
When the shadowy twilight falls,
While I stand and wait by the pasture gate
As the whippoorwill loudly calls;
The cows come home through the shady lane,
Brindle, and Bess, and Nell,
With their comrades all marching slowly on
To the sound of the tinkling bell.

A load of hay, in the street to-day,
And a scent of clover blooms;
A fragrance sweet floats up from the street,
Through my dim and dusty room.
And the musty volumes of legal lore,
The tiresome briefs and bills,
For a moment are gone, and a care-free boy
Still sports on his homestead hills.

Worried.—The best way of ridding a house of rats is to fill all the holes that can be found with pounded glass, and seal them up with plaster of Paris and tin, if you wish. Then thoroughly clean the premises, and see that there are no garbage pails left about to attract rats, and secure the services of a good cat.

N. A.—Well clean with spirits of turpentine; then make a paste with some of the spirits of turpentine and whiting; lay this all over the parts to be whitened, and set them in the sun, when dry wash off with turps and repeat till bleached. This will be of no avail, however, unless you are dealing with real ivory.

Minna.—If you have to do housework, always rub a little glycerine and rose-water, mixed in equal proportions, into your hands after washing and drying, especially if they have been very dirty. Rub well in, and then rub with a little lemon-juice and rose-water, also mixed in equal proportions, and any unpleasant stickiness will be removed.

Housewife.—A raw potato, cut into small pieces, and put into the vessel with equal parts of vinegar and water, and shaken about for a few minutes, will cleanse the glass better than anything else. Especially is this treatment valuable where hard water has been kept in glass jugs, as it removes every trace of the brown deposit, which is one of the distinguishing properties in hard water.

C. B.—Chiaroscuro is that branch of painting which has for its object the combination and arrangement of the light and dark parts of a picture to the best advantage. Relief and depth, and what is generally called the effect of a picture, are produced by chiaroscuro. Leonardo da Vinci was the first to reduce the art of chiaroscuro to a system. Correggio afterwards improved it practically, and it is considered to have reached perfection under Titian.

Inquirer.—"Animalcule" is a term etymologically applicable to any very small animal and limited in actual use to those which are microscopical; such exist in prodigious numbers, and of many different kinks, their size being such that multitudes of them can find ample space for all the movements of an active life within a single drop of water. They abound chiefly wherever there is moisture.

M. D.—A son is no way or degree responsible for a mother's debts, except he takes possession of any money or goods she has left, and then he is liable up to the value of what he receives, no further; the woman's funeral and death-bed expenses, then house rent, come first in that order; if these exhaust value, son's reply to other creditors is, he has no estate to pay them with.

Eva.—Take half a cupful of butter, one cupful of sugar, half a cupful of milk, two cupfuls of flour and two teaspoonfuls of baking powder. Bake in two layers and spread chopped pineapple between the layers after the cage is cold. The recipe is very popular down where the pines grow, but any recipe for strawberry shortcake will do as well by substituting the pine for the berries.

Fanny.—You can clean a shiny-looking black silk most effectively by boiling old black kid gloves in a little water and sponging the liquor into the silk and then pressing quickly. Fullers'-earth will help to remove grease and soot marks. Benzine will often remove spots; but you must be very careful to rub towards the centre of the spot, and not outward, or the clean material is stained.

Allie.—You can quite well clean these at home, if you do not mind a trouble. First rub well with cream of tartar and cold water mixed to a rather thick paste. Leave for an hour, then rub with powdered alum and fullers'-earth mixed in equal parts. Next day brush them with a clean, soft brush till all the powder is removed, and rub with fine oatmeal, to which a little dry whiting or prepared chalk has been added, wiping this off with a dry cloth.

Brenda.—The great things to remember are not to rub soap on the material, but to dissolve it in the water before putting in the blouse; to finish washing one blouse before beginning another; to have washing and rinsing water of the same temperature; and to add a very little soap to the latter, as flannel blouses, like blankets, are softer and look nicer done in this way than if rinsed in clear water. Nearly dry out of doors in a windy but shady place, and then iron on the wrong side with a moderately hot iron.

Mark.—General Buller relieved Ladysmith; his movement to that end was successful, and he must have reached the besieged town even if Lord Roberts had not previously relieved Kimberley; the Boers knew the game was up, and had begun to withdraw their heavy guns from Ladysmith before the news about Kimberley and Cronje's surrender reached them; but Lord Roberts' operations made the latter part of Buller's task lighter; they spared him a stiff final fight with his enemy.

A. J.—First brush all the dust out carefully and rip off the bindings or trimmings, carefully picking out threads. Fill a pail half full of warm rain water and put in a tablespoonful of pearline; then immerse the hat in it, moving it up and down until every fibre is wet. Lift it out of the water, lay it upon a board or table, and brush it thoroughly with a stiff brush. After all the dirt is removed, rinse it in clean warm water. Allow it to drip for a few minutes and then iron it, placing a thin cloth between the straw and the iron. Press the crown over a bowl, and when this is done press the brim, using the bare iron on the wrong side to make it stiff.

Bessie.—Before painting or gilding, so much of the space as is to be covered, and slightly beyond its outline, must be sized. This is to stop absorption, and to prevent the oil from running. A preparation for the purpose is sold at artists' colour shops, or may be made by dissolving isinglass in water, or by boiling down cuttings of parchment. For gildering or silvering, oil gold size can be used on this ground; and for painting, ordinary tube oil colours. To prevent cracking, care must be taken not to lay on the colour too thickly, but to thin it down well with turps. It is better to attain the desired depth of colour by two thin coats than by one thick one. As regards varnish—if the colours are found to dry equally dead throughout, varnishing becomes simply a question of taste. Some prefer the dead painting, which shows equally in all lights.

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